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Allegiances

WINDCLAN

Leader: Gladestar - Light golden yellow tabby she-cat with pale greenish yellow eyes.

Deputy: Monarchwing - Orange she-cat with black spots and ear tips, golden yellow muzzle, chin, nose blaze, chest, and tail tip, darker orange paws, yellowish green eyes.

Medicine Cat: Silverberry - Silver she-cat with a darker front left paw, tail tip, and right ear, green eyes.

Apprentice, Starpaw

Warriors:

Wetbelly - Dark gray tabby tom with a black underbelly, blue eyes.

Featherblaze -Pale ginger tabby she-cat with a white chest, amber eyes.

Apprentice, Sharppaw

Darkstorm - Black tom with green eyes.

Thunderjolt - Broad shouldered black and white tom with silver stripes and amber eyes.

Firetail - Orange tom with a red tail and ears, yellow eyes.

Apprentice, Blazingpaw

Soakedears - Very dark gray tom with black ears and paws, dark green eyes.

Apprentice, Scorchpaw

Icetail - White tom with amber eyes.

Jaggedear - Brown tabby tom with a torn left ear, green eyes.

Apprentice, Tornadopaw

Jaystreak - Blue-gray and black tom with a white stripe across each side, blue eyes.

Driftrunner- Dark golden brown tom with very thick black classic tabby stripes, muzzle, chin, ears, paws, chest, and underbelly, amber eyes.

Apprentice, Petalpaw

Howlstorm - Dark gray tom with green eyes.

Dandeliontail - Yellow tabby and white she-cat with yellow eyes.

Whitehare - White tom with light green eyes.

Apprentices

Starpaw - Golden yellow she-cat with a yellow tail tip and star shape on chest, yellow eyes.

Blazingpaw - Golden yellow tom with yellow eyes.

Petalpaw - Yellow, orange, and white she-cat with yellow eyes.

Tornadopaw - Dark gray tabby tom with yellow eyes.

Scorchpaw - Dark tortoiseshell tom that is mostly black with small ginger splotches, amber eyes.

Sharppaw - Thin black tom with green-yellow eyes.

Queens

Willowtail- Light gray tabby she-cat with blue eyes. Expecting Icetail's kits.

Clovernose - Brown and white she-cat with green eyes. Expecting

Thunderjolt's kits.

Elders

Whitefrost - White she-cat with blue eyes.

Cornwhisker - Golden tabby and white tom with yellow eyes.

SHADOWCLAN

Leader: Depthstar - Very dark blue-gray tom with a lighter front left paw, dark blue eyes.

Deputy: Cobratail - Mottled dark red and black tabby tom with amber eyes.

Medicine cat: Hawkfeather - Spotted brown tabby tom with yellow eyes.

Apprentice, Dewpaw

Warriors

Bluerain - Light blue gray speckled she-cat with blue eyes.

Crowmask - Black tom with amber eyes.

Ashcloud - Dark gray and white tom with pale green eyes.

Silverblossom - Silver spotted she-cat with ice blue eyes.

Maplefur - Creamy tabby tom with yellow eyes.

Apprentice, Diamondpaw

Rosebreeze - Creamy ginger tabby she-cat with pale amber eyes.

Milkblaze - White tom with creamy points, pale yellow eyes.

Cougarfoot - Golden brown tom with a white muzzle, black ear tips and tail tip, amber eyes.

Cliffshade - Dark brown and gray tom with a white underbelly, yellow eyes.

Poppywing - Light red-brown tabby she-cat with light blue eyes.

Rainheart - Light gray tabby tom with yellow eyes.

Bloomfire - Orange she-cat with white paws, muzzle, and chin, dark ginger ears.

Flameheart - Ginger tabby tom with green eyes.

Copperstripe - Dark golden ginger tabby tom with amber eyes.

Timberstorm - Dark brown tabby tom with yellow eyes.

Apprentices

Dewpaw - Spotted gray tom with yellow eyes. The medicine cat apprentice.

Diamondpaw - Silver gray she-cat with darker spots, white chest, muzzle, and chin, ice blue eyes.

Queens

Sunflower - Ginger tabby she-cat with yellow eyes. Mother to Depthstar's kits:

Blackkit - Black tom with yellow eyes.

Brownkit - Brown tabby tom with yellow eyes.

Boost - Brown tabby tom with yellow eyes. Former loner.

Song - White she-cat with light blue eyes. Former loner.

-

Greenpine - Brown tabby she-cat with green eyes. Mother to Ashcloud's kits:

Stripedkit - Tortoiseshell tom with white paws, chest, and muzzle,

black mark on his nose, blue eyes.

Mottledkit - Mottled brown tom with amber eyes.

Foxkit- Black and very dark ginger tom with a bushy tail, dark amber eyes.

-

Poisonedsap - Dark golden she-cat with dark brown muzzle, throat, and nose blaze, black ears, paws, and tail tip, amber eyes. Expecting Maplefur's kits.

Elders

Buzzardglare- Dark brown tabby tom with one blind eye, yellow eyes.

Foxshine - Ginger she-cat with yellow eyes.

Carrottail - Orange tabby tom with yellow eyes.

RIVERCLAN

Leader: Frostedstar - White tom with pale blue eyes.

Deputy: Ravenfeather - Black tom with amber eyes.

Medicine cat: Otterpelt - Red-brown she-cat with amber eyes.

Warriors

Petalfin - Silver, dark gray, black, and white splashed she-cat with blue eyes.

Dipfoot - Gray tom with silver paws, blue eyes.

Cherryberry - Red and ginger she-cat with amber eyes.

Winterlight - Long furred dark gray and pale yellow she-cat with yellow eyes.

Apprentice, Pebblepaw

Duckwing - Dark brown tabby tom with sea green eyes.

Warmmoss - Light brown and white she-cat with pale green-yellow eyes.

Heartsong - Silver and white she-cat with black ears and tail, blue eyes.

Darkminnow - Sleek black tom with dark teal eyes.

Apprentice, Rainpaw

Mintfrost - White tom with small silver tabby patches, green eyes.

Apprentice, Lemonpaw

Arcticblaze - Small white tom with ice blue eyes.

Dovewhisper- Pale silver and white tabby she-cat with pale green eyes.

Thunderwater - Dark gray and black tabby tom with dark blue eyes.

Frostleaf - Mottled pale brown and white speckled tom with a white face and legs, blue eyes.

Tansytail - Light golden brown tabby she-cat with green eyes.

Apprentices

Lemonpaw- White tom with yellow patches and yellow eyes.

Rainpaw - Silver she-cat with darker splashes, light blue eyes.

Pebblepaw- Mottled gray tom with white paws, pale green eyes.

Sagepaw - Silver and black tabby she-cat with pale blue-green eyes. The medicine cat apprentice.

Queens

Risingmoon - White she-cat with dark gray and silver tabby points, blue eyes. Expecting Darkminnow's kits.

Elders

Mudslip - Brown tom with darker ears, tail tip, and paws, black muzzle, green eyes.

Swanpool - Slender white she-cat with black tail tip, ears, muzzle, and toes, ice blue eyes.

THUNDERCLAN

Leader: Strawberrystar - Speckled reddish-ginger and cream she-cat with amber eyes.

Deputy: Snowfalcon - Broad shouldered white tom with amber eyes.

Apprentice, Darkpaw

Medicine Cat: Spicewhisker - Small black tom with a white muzzle, tail tip, and front right paw, yellow eyes.

Warriors

Broadwing - Broad shouldered dark brown tabby tom with amber eyes.

Apprentice, Batpaw

Oaktuft - Brown and cream tabby tom with amber eyes.

Morningmist - Light gray tabby she-cat with light blue eyes.

Chillwhisker - Light gray tabby tom with light blue eyes.

Hickoryroot - Brown tabby tom with amber eyes.

Cedarnose - Dark brown tabby tom with a white splashed muzzle and paws, amber eyes.

Vanillafern - Creamy colored tabby she-cat with pale yellow eyes.

Apprentices

Batpaw - Smoky black tom with gray-brown muzzle and underbelly, amber eyes.

Darkpaw - Very dark brown tom with swirled black stripes, amber eyes.

SKYCLAN

Leader: Ravenstar - Long furred black tom with green eyes.

Deputy: Sandblaze - Light golden yellow tom with light brown-ginger paws, mark on chest, ears, chin, and yellowish blaze on forehead and tail tip. Yellow eyes.

Medicine Cat: Ryeheart - Brown tabby tom with dark brown tabby legs, tail, ears, and nose blaze, creamy chin, muzzle, chest, and tail tip, amber eyes.

Warriors

Tigerleap - Dark golden brown tabby tom with amber eyes.

Brackenleaf - Dark ginger tabby tom with amber eyes.

Chapter 1

The sky was darkening above the moor. Most cats were beginning to go to their nests, while the WindClan deputy, Monarchwing, was speaking with the cats who had just returned from patrol. Everyone was settling down for the night.

A kit sat in the entrance of the nursery, her eyes fixed on the sky. *Silverpelt will appear soon!* She thought excitedly. Being a young kit, she didn't get to be out at night often. The nursery was one of the only dens in the camp with a roof. WindClan cats enjoyed being out in the open, but she couldn't help but feel that she longed for it more than the rest of her clanmates. At least, that was the idea she got from her siblings in the nursery.

"What are you doing, Starkit?" Blazingkit asked behind her.

Starkit didn't look away from the sky. "Waiting for silverpelt to appear."

She heard her brother purr in amusement, and a moment later, Petalkit spoke. "But why? They're just stars."

She turned to her siblings, feeling a bit hurt. "That's not true," She meowed. "Silverberry says they're the warriors of StarClan watching over us. Don't you feel how amazing that is?"

The other kits were quiet for a moment, exchanging a glance. "I guess so," Blazingkit mewed.

"Hey, come play with us!" Petalkit urged, her little yellow and white tail high in the air. "You never do."

Starkit sighed and returned her gaze to the dusk sky. *They'll never understand.* She was aware that she wasn't like other kits. Most enjoyed play fighting, tossing a ball of moss back and forth, or exploring the camp. But she was different. She was quiet and reserved, spending most of her time thinking about StarClan and

trying to understand their ways. She didn't like rough play or silly games. *Some cats look at me strangely. They don't understand me. But I don't care. StarClan understands me.*

"Kits, it's getting dark out," Featherblaze called softly from the back of the den. "Time to go to sleep."

Petalkit's tail drooped. "Aww! But we were having fun! We're not even tired." Beside her, Blazingkit let out a yawn, and his sister shot him a disappointed look. "Blazingkit!" She whispered in dismay.

Featherblaze purred in amusement. "You can play again tomorrow." The kits reluctantly turned and crawled into the nest against the queen, who looked at them fondly before raising her gaze. "That means you too, Starkit."

She looked over her shoulder in dismay. "But I want to see silverpelt. Can't I please stay awake a little longer?" She asked hopefully.

The queen shook her head, her amber eyes warm. "You've seen silverpelt many times. Come, you need to get a good night's sleep."

With a last longing look at the sky, she reluctantly turned and headed back toward their nest. *I don't want StarClan to think I don't appreciate them...!* She curled up in the moss close to her siblings, and the queen licked her head.

Featherblaze wasn't their real mother. Several moons ago, a horrible group of rogues led by a cat named Bone Shred had terrorized the clans. Starkit and her siblings had been very young when the rogues attacked the WindClan camp. One of them had broken into the nursery and killed their mother, Dreamwhisper, as she fought to defend them. It was one of Starkit's only memories of the terrible time, though she wished she could forget it.

She and her siblings had been taken care of by Dreamwhisper's sister, Featherblaze, along with their father, Weaselnose, who often came to visit. However in a battle against Bone Shred's rogues at a gathering, their father had been killed.

It wasn't easy carrying on without a mother and father. Every couple in the clan looked forward to seeing their kits become warriors, but neither parent would be there for Starkit and her siblings. They wouldn't even see them become apprentices. For a while, this reality had made her feel alone and afraid.

That was until Silverberry promised her that Weaselnose and Dreamwhisper were watching over her from StarClan. Not only them, but countless others, star-pelted warriors that guided the pawsteps of the living. The thought comforted and fascinated Starkit. Someone was there for her. Someone was promising her that everything would be alright. She was not alone, and she never would be.

Featherblaze cared for and loved them as though they were her own. They were her sister's kits, after all. But it wasn't the same as having their real parents here. Starkit could still remember Dreamwhisper's scent, warm and comforting. *I miss her...*

With a soft sigh, Starkit closed her eyes. *I guess I can try to sleep... Maybe I'll dream of StarClan!*

***

It felt like a moon had passed. Starkit rolled over in her nest, twitching her tail restlessly. *I've been trying to fall asleep forever!* After a while longer, she gave up and opened her eyes, slowly sitting up in the nest. It was night now, and the den was dark with shadows. She looked toward the entrance of the den, and her heart began to race with excitement. *Maybe I can go outside!* She quickly looked around.

Featherblaze was asleep, her flank rising and falling softly. Blazingkit and Petalkit were curled up close to each other. She carefully crept out of the nest, resisting the exciting urge to bolt out into the clearing. I can't wake them. She kept her pawsteps light and slow as she cautiously moved toward the entrance. When she reached it, she quickened her pace and hurried into the clearing.

She stopped a short distance away from the nursery and looked up, drawing in a deep breath.

Wow...!

The stars of silverpelt glittered against the dark blue tones of the night sky. They scattered like snowflakes frozen in time, wrapping the world in its beautiful glittering cloak. *It's amazing...* She stared up at them in awe, her eyes wide and filled with wonder. As she moved her gaze across the sky and down toward the moor, she caught sight of another cat in the clearing. Silverberry was sitting outside the medicine den with her tail curled over her paws, her eyes fixed up at the sky.

Without hesitation, Starkit crossed the clearing toward her. "Is StarClan speaking to you?" She asked excitedly.

Silverberry jumped a little, her eyes snapping down to her. "Starkit!" She let out a sigh as she relaxed. "You startled me."

Starkit lowered her head guiltily. "Sorry! Were you having a vision? Did I interrupt?" She asked worriedly. What if StarClan was telling her something important, and I disrupted them?

"No, it's alright," The medicine cat meowed quietly, her green eyes warm. "Shouldn't you be asleep?"

She hesitated, shuffling her little yellow paws. "I couldn't sleep," She meowed. "And I really wanted to see silverpelt."

"I see," Silverberry purred and returned her gaze to the stars. Starkit sat down beside her and followed her gaze. After a long moment, she spoke again. "It's beautiful, isn't it?"

Starkit nodded as she gazed up at the glittering warriors of StarClan. "It's amazing!" She breathed. "Is all of StarClan really up there?"

"Yes," The silver she-cat meowed softly. "Every single star is a fallen warrior watching over us. StarClan is always guiding our pawsteps, helping each cat fulfill their own destiny."

Every single star... Starkit stared up at them. I wonder which ones are Dreamwhisper and Weaselnose... She looked up at the medicine cat, fascinated. "What's it like talking to StarClan?"

"It's a difficult feeling to explain," Silverberry murmured as she gazed at the starry sky. "It's... peaceful, yet exciting at the same time. It's wonderful. There are always warriors, but few cats have the skill and faith that is needed to become a medicine cat. It's a gift that I'm honored to have. Every time I visit the moonstone or heal an injured clanmate, I feel a feeling like no other. It's truly amazing."

Starkit stared up at the stars, her heart swelling with warmth and excitement as she imagined speaking with the warriors of StarClan, receiving prophecies and visions, being able to see the moonstone every quarter moon. She thought of learning about the uses of every plant and berry in the forest and being able to help her clanmates.

The cool green-leaf breeze felt comforting and exhilarating against her pelt as she became certain of her future. *I'm going to be a medicine cat!*

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"Let every cat old enough to catch their own prey, gather beneath the boulder for a clan meeting!"

Starkit's heart burst with excitement as she heard Gladestar's call from out in the clearing. *It's time!* She started forward, but Featherblaze gently stepped on her tail.

"Hold on a moment!" The queen purred and began covering her with licks.

Petalkit let out a chuckle. "She did it to us, too!"

"But I'm fine!" Starkit insisted, shrinking back. "I'm always clean because I don't play like Blazingkit and Petalkit do!"

As Featherblaze let her go and stepped back, her siblings padded up to her, their eyes saddening.

"Do you have to be a medicine cat?" Blazingkit asked quietly. "We won't be able to train together..."

Petalkit nodded. "We'll miss you..."

She felt a pang of sadness, but it didn't last long. She blinked warmly at them. "I'm not going to another clan. I'll still be here." With a purr, she added, "Hopefully you two won't get into any trouble, or we'll be seeing each other a lot more!"

Blazingkit's yellow eyes shone. "I won't get into any trouble. I'll be a great warrior!"

"And me!" Petalkit exclaimed, nudging her brother playfully. "The best warriors in WindClan!"

Outside the nursery, many cats were already gathered, and the three kits hurried out into the clearing, followed more slowly by Featherblaze.

The sun shone in the bright blue sky, and a gentle, warm breeze drifted across the sandy clearing. The clan was settled and speaking to one another quietly as they waited for the ceremony to begin.

"Go on," Featherblaze purred and gently nudged Starkit with her muzzle. "I'll be watching."

Starkit and her siblings wove through the crowd, and many cats purred and gave them warm looks as they passed.

"There they are!" Willowtail purred.

"The new apprentices." Soakedears nodded to them as they passed him.

When they reached the base of the boulder, they stopped, and Starkit waved her fluffy yellow tail excitedly, her heart beating rapidly in her chest. *It's finally happening!*

Ontop of the boulder sat Gladestar, her golden tabby fur shining under the sunlight. Sitting below the boulder to the right was Monarchwing, the clan deputy. A little ways away from her was Silverberry, who was gazing at Starkit warmly.

She returned the medicine cat's gaze, her body tingling with excitement. *I'm going to be her apprentice! A medicine cat apprentice! I can't wait to start training!*

"Cats of WindClan," Gladestar began, and the cats below quieted. "The time has come for three kits to become apprentices." She paused, her pale lime colored eyes warm as she gazed down at them. "Dreamwhisper and Weaselnose would be very proud of you," She murmured.

Starkit remembered that Gladestar was their kin. The clan leader had been Dreamwhisper's mother. She must be very fond of us. Do we remind her of Dreamwhisper?

After a moment, she continued. "Blazingkit, from this day on, until you receive your warrior name, you will be known as Blazingpaw. Your mentor will be Firetail. I trust that he will pass down all he knows on to you."

Starkit watched as her brother eagerly padded forward to meet the orange warrior, touching noses with him.

"Blazingpaw! Blazingpaw!" The clan cheered as Blazingpaw and Firetail moved to the side.

When the cheering died down, Gladestar went on. "Petalkit, from this day on, until you receive your warrior name, you will be known as Petalpaw. Your mentor will be Driftrunner."

A golden brown and black striped warrior stepped forward, blinking warmly at his new apprentice. Petalpaw excitedly rushed forward and touched her nose to his.

"Petalpaw! Petalpaw!"

As the clan chanted her sister's name, Starkit's stomach twisted with both nervousness and excitement. *I'm next!* She couldn't believe it. Her dream was about to come true. She stared up at Gladestar eagerly.

"And last, but certainly not least." Gladestar rested her warm gaze on her. "Starkit, from this day on, until you receive your full name, you will be known as Starpaw. I understand that Silverberry wishes to train you in the ways of a medicine cat, and it is the path that you long to follow. Your mentor will be Silverberry. I trust that she

will pass down all she knows on to you."

I'm a medicine cat apprentice! Starpaw thought, joy blazing through her from ears to tail tip. *I'm a real medicine cat apprentice!* She tried to control her excitement as she padded over to Silverberry, her head high.

The silver she-cat touched noses with her, and the clan began to cheer happily. "Starpaw! Starpaw!"

As they took a step back from each other, Silverberry gazed at her warmly. "I've looked forward to this day," She purred. "I hope that I won't disappoint you."

"Of course not!" Starpaw purred. "You'll be a great mentor."

"And you'll be a great apprentice," The medicine cat responded warmly. "You have chosen a wonderful path, Starpaw. I can see already that you have the true spirit of a medicine cat."

I do? Starpaw thought excitedly. She looked over her shoulder and saw Blazingpaw and Petalpaw looking at her happily. Beyond them, Featherblaze's eyes were full of pride and love.

"Thank you!" Starpaw purred and looked at her new mentor eagerly. "When do we start training?"

Silverberry let out a purr. "How about now?" She started to turn away. "Come on, you'll need a nest too. The medicine den is yours too now."

Wow! Starpaw hurried after her. *It's really happened! I'm going to be a medicine cat!*

Chapter 2

A quarter moon hung in the night sky. The clearing was nearly empty, as most cats were getting ready to sleep. Monarchwing and Gladestar were speaking quietly near the boulder, and Featherblaze was sitting near Jaystreak on the far side of the clearing, grooming herself.

Starpaw stood outside the medicine den, her paws itching with excitement. She had been a medicine cat apprentice for a moon now, and it was finally time for her first journey to the moonstone. *I wonder what StarClan will say to me! Will they like me? Will I see Dreamwhisper and Weaselnose*? Her mind raced with questions that she couldn't wait to get the answers to.

"Are you ready?" Silverberry stepped out of her den, and Starpaw nodded, feeling warm with anticipation.

Gladestar noticed the medicine cat and dipped her head to Monarchwing before padding over to them. "As always, have a safe journey," She meowed and looked at Starpaw with a purr. "I hope you'll enjoy your first meeting with StarClan."

"I will," She purred. *How could any cat not enjoy it?*

"Starpaw!"

She looked past the clan leader to see Featherblaze hurry over, her amber eyes glowing with pride. "Have a safe journey," She purred and gave Starpaw's ear a lick. "You'll make a wonderful medicine cat."

"Thank you," Starpaw meowed happily. *I hope StarClan thinks so too.*

As Featherblaze and the clan leader left them and headed for their dens, Silverberry turned to Starpaw, her eyes shining. "We'd better get going. The other medicine cats will be waiting for us."

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The two cats padded over the hills toward highstones. The grass felt cool and soft under her paws and around her as she stepped through the long blades. It was a nice contrast from the warm weather that had been so frequent lately. She moved closely behind Silverberry.

The silver she-cat looked over her shoulder. "Are you nervous?" She asked.

Starpaw hesitated. "A little," She admitted. "But I'm more excited. I've always wanted to visit StarClan." She paused and quickened her pace to pad alongside her mentor. "What was your first visit to the moonstone like?" She asked curiously.

"I'll never forget it." Silverberry's teal eyes grew distant and warm with memories. "I was more nervous than anything. I was worried that StarClan wouldn't accept me. I suppose being a medicine cat is a great honor, and I feared that I wasn't good enough."

"But why?" Starpaw asked. "You're a great medicine cat."

Silverberry purred. "Not always. It took me longer than most apprentices to memorize the uses of different herbs. I felt like a failure and considered becoming a warrior apprentice instead. But my mentor, Hivepelt, was kind and patient with me. He believed that I would be a good medicine cat as long as I continued to work hard and believe in myself." Her eyes shone. "And he was right. In time, I mastered my skills. And now, I'm passing those skills on to you." She looked at Starpaw fondly.

Starpaw let out a purr. "I can't wait to learn it all."

They reached the thunderpath, and Silverberry raised her tail in signal as she stopped, looking cautiously from side to side. Starpaw hung back uneasily. *I've never been so close to the thunderpath...* The air reeked with its horrible scent, and she wrinkled her nose in disgust.

Silverberry looked back at her. "It's alright," She called softly. "It's

safe to cross. Monsters don't come out much at night, and if they do, it's easy to see them coming. They have glowing eyes."

That's right. Starpaw thought with a shiver. *It's hard to imagine such a horrible creature.* She cautiously stepped to Silverberry's side, and together they bounded across the thunderpath. She was surprised at how strange the hard, cool surface felt under her paws. *It's so unnatural!*

She was glad when they reached the other side and began walking on cool grass again. Up ahead, she saw the entrance to a cave in the side of highstones. The silhouettes of other cats sat around it, waiting. *The moonstone cave... And the other medicine cats!*

When they reached them, she saw the other cats more clearly. They all looked to the newcomers, and Silverberry dipped her head in greeting. "I hope you haven't been waiting long."

"Not at all," A reddish brown assured her with a purr, her tail curled over her paws. "Spicewhisker and Ryeheart arrived just before you."

A black and white tom nodded and looked at Silverberry. "It hasn't been long."

Starpaw felt awkward and shuffled her paws. *I know I'm a medicine cat apprentice, but it doesn't feel like I belong here... These cats are all strangers to me.*

A brown tabby tom rested his gaze on Starpaw. "Who is this?" He prompted, though he sounded like he already knew. The others looked at her, and she nervously twitched her tail.

Silverberry looked at her. "This is my new apprentice, Starpaw," She meowed proudly, then added to her. "These are the other medicine cats from each clan."

"Greetings," The reddish brown she-cat purred. "I'm Otterpelt of RiverClan."

The black and white tom spoke up next. "I'm ThunderClan's medicine cat, Spicewhisker." He turned toward a brown tabby tom. "That's Ryeheart of SkyClan."

"My name is Hawkfeather, I'm the ShadowClan medicine cat," The brown tabby meowed and gave a nod to the smaller cat beside him. "This is my apprentice, Dewpaw."

The gray spotted tom looked close to her age. He dipped his head to her, his yellow eyes friendly.

"I-It's nice to meet you all," Starpaw meowed politely, suddenly feeling small and shy.

Silverberry seemed to notice that she felt uncomfortable and leaned closer to her. "Don't worry, it's only a bit awkward the first time. In time, you'll feel as though they were your own clanmates. You're one of us, and you belong here."

"That's right," Otterpelt agreed, giving Starpaw a sympathetic look. "We may be from different clans, but as medicine cats, we share a bond and the same will. To help others, and to pass on StarClan's messages to our clans."

Starpaw felt a little comforted by this. *That's right. I'll be meeting with these cats every quarter moon and full moon. I'll feel much more comfortable around them soon enough. I'll be a medicine cat just like them.* "Thank you, Otterpelt." She dipped her head.

"We should go inside now." Hawkfeather rose to his paws and looked toward the cave. "We can't sit around all night. StarClan is waiting."

StarClan is waiting. His words sent chills up her spine, and excitement fluttering through her stomach. The medicine cats began filing into the cave. Starpaw and Silverberry were the last to go in. She hesitated and looked at her mentor.

"Go ahead," Silverberry meowed. "I'll be right behind you."

Starpaw drew in a deep breath and stepped into the cave behind Ryeheart. The tunnel was so small and narrow that she had to lower her head as she crept through it. As she went deeper, her surroundings grew darker and darker until she couldn't see Ryeheart in front of her, let alone her own paws. The darkness and

tight space nearly sent her into panic, but she quickly calmed herself. It's okay. There's nothing to be afraid of. This place is sacred to StarClan.

The tunnel began to open up, and she could faintly see light up ahead, as well as the other medicine cats silhouetted against it. When they reached the cave, Starpaw drew in a sharp breath. *Wow...!*

Centered in the cave before her stood the moonstone. It was a huge, gleaming stone, illuminated my moonlight shining through a hole in the roof of the cave. The stone shone and lit up the rocky walls of the cave in a soothing pale light. It was more beautiful and breathtaking than she could have imagined.

"It's amazing, isn't it?" Silverberry meowed softly as she stepped out from behind her.

For a moment, Starpaw was too awestruck to respond, her eyes fixed on the glowing stone. "It's beautiful," She breathed.

The other cats began to spread out and sit around the moonstone, turning to her. Starpaw dragged her gaze away from the glowing stone as Silverberry stood before her, silver pelt pale under the light of the moonstone. "Before we share tongues with StarClan, we must hold your medicine cat apprentice ceremony."

The ceremony! I almost forgot! Starpaw nodded, feeling her chest swell with happiness and anticipation.

The other medicine cats gazed at Starpaw as Silverberry began. "Starpaw, is it your wish to enter the mysteries of StarClan as a medicine cat?"

"It is," Starpaw breathed, meaning the words with all her heart.

"Then come forward." Silverberry's eyes glowed.

She stepped closer to the moonstone, her heart pounding as she met her mentor's gaze.

Silverberry continued speaking, her voice confident and warm.

"Warriors of StarClan, I present to you this apprentice. She has chosen the path of a medicine cat. Grant her your wisdom and insight so that she may understand your ways and heal her clan in accordance with your will."

When she finished, the other medicine cats purred and gave her nods and looks of approval. Starpaw felt warm from ears to tail with pride. *StarClan recognizes me as a medicine cat apprentice now.*

The medicine cats began to settle, closing their eyes, and Silverberry touched her nose to Starpaw's ear. "Touch your nose to the moonstone and close your eyes," She instructed. "It's time to share tongues with StarClan."

She felt her legs tremble as she crouched and settled against the cool floor of the cave, looking at the stone nervously as Silverberry moved to rest beside her. *I can't believe this is happening..!*

Not far from her, Dewpaw was crouched and watching her, his yellow eyes warm and friendly. "Don't worry," He meowed. "StarClan will welcome you."

His words comforted her, and she blinked gratefully at him. Dewpaw closed his eyes and touched his nose to the stone, going still. Starpaw drew in a deep breath and returned her gaze to the shimmering surface of the stone, her heart pounding hard in her chest. *It's time...* Focusing on all her faith in StarClan, she closed her eyes and moved forward until she felt the cold stone meet her nose.

After a few moments, she felt the icy touch of the moonstone vanish, and the air around her grew warmer. It was a comfortable temperature, not hot, but not cold either. She'd never felt such perfect weather. She felt warm grass under her paws and slowly opened her eyes, letting out a gasp.

StarClan...!

She'd never seen any place so beautiful. The grass under her paws shimmered with starlight, the trees and bushes greener than any that even the finest green-leaf could offer. Stars glittered in a calming blue sky. She slowly turned around, taking in every detail

of her surroundings.

"Greetings, Starpaw."

She froze as a cat spoke her name and turned in the direction of the voice. A golden spotted tom was padding toward her, almost drifting over the grass like a gentle breeze. His pelt glittered with starlight, and his eyes shone warm with welcome.

A warrior of StarClan! For a heartbeat, she could only stare at him in awe before she found the courage to speak. "H-Hello! Who are you?"

The tom dipped his head. "My name is Hivepelt," He meowed. "I was Silverberry's mentor. I am happy to meet you. She made a great choice."

"Thank you," Starpaw breathed happily. "It's an honor to meet you. I-I hope I'll be a great medicine cat."

"I know you will be."

A new voice spoke, and though she couldn't place it, she recognized it at once from distant memories. A star-pelted cream and yellow she-cat was approaching, her pale green eyes glowing with warmth. Hivepelt stepped back as she neared.

"Dreamwhisper!" Starpaw cried and rushed forward to meet her, pressing her head against her soft fur.

Her mother purred and gave her head a lick before she stepped back, gazing at her lovingly. "It's good to see you, Starpaw," She purred. "I'm so proud of you and your littermates."

"So am I."

Starpaw's heart leaped as Weaselnose joined Dreamwhisper, his eyes glowing, and she let out a purr. "Weaselnose!" She stepped forward to touch noses with her father. After a moment she stepped back and gazed at her parents happily, her tail high in the air. "I'm so happy to see you!" Her heart swelled with joy and longing. "I miss you so much."

"There's nothing to miss, Starpaw," Dreamwhisper nuzzled her. "We're always with you, even if you can't see us."

"And since you're a medicine cat, you'll be seeing us a lot more," Weaselnose added, his eyes glinting with amusement. "You might even get tired of us."

"Never!" Starpaw purred, and her parents chuckled. Behind them, she saw movement in some bushes, and a pair of yellow eyes. "Who's that?"

A heartbeat later, the eyes vanished. Hivepelt's eyes flickered with something unreadable, and Dreamwhisper looked down. Weaselnose spoke up. "Probably just some prey. There is always plenty in StarClan."

Somehow, she wasn't sure she believed him. She looked toward the bushes curiously, but Dreamwhisper stepped forward, wordlessly asking for her attention. "You will make a wonderful medicine cat, my sweet daughter," She murmured lovingly. "Follow your heart and serve your clan well. We will always be here to guide your pawsteps."

The trees and cats around her began to fade until Starpaw found herself staring into the darkness of her eyelids. She felt the cold stone under her once more and opened her eyes slowly, blinking. She was back at the moonstone. *Wow...* She slowly sat up. *That was amazing!*

Around her, the other medicine cats were waking. Ryeheart arched his back in a stretch, and Hawkfeather was blinking away sleep. Beside Starpaw, Silverberry was awake and looking at her expectantly.

"I met StarClan," Starpaw breathed to her. "It's so beautiful there!"

Her mentor purred. "It is. Did they tell you anything?"

"Dreamwhisper said that I'd be a great medicine cat," Starpaw meowed, her heart aching with longing to see her mother again. She already missed her.

"That's one prophecy I know will come true." Silverberry's eyes gleamed. As she turned to speak with Otterpelt, Starpaw happily recalled her meeting with StarClan, trying to remember every detail.

"How was your first meeting?" Dewpaw prompted from behind her.

She turned to face him and purred. "It was wonderful! I met with Weaselnose and Dreamwhisper." She paused before adding, "They're my parents."

The ShadowClan apprentice's eyes flashed with sympathy at the realization that both her parents were dead. But he didn't say anything about it, and for that she was grateful. "That's great! I saw my father, Stormstar."

Starpaw had still been a kit when the old ShadowClan leader had died. Though he had survived the battles against Bone Shred and his rogues, a fight with a fox just a few moons later had cost him his last life. She hadn't been aware that Dewpaw was Stormstar's son though.

"He must be very proud of you," Starpaw meowed with a purr.

Dewpaw looked embarrassed. "Well, being a medicine cat isn't exactly like being a clan leader," He purred. "It's great to be able to share dreams with your kin though. We're lucky, most cats can't."

"Starpaw, come on," Silverberry called, and Starpaw looked up to see she and the other medicine cats gathered by the tunnel. "It's time to go."

She and Dewpaw hurried over, and the medicine cats padded back out through the narrow tunnel. When they emerged from the cave, Starpaw was surprised to see that it was nearly dawn. How long were we asleep?

"See you next moon," Otterpelt meowed, touching her nose to Silverberry's.

Spicewhisker was dipping his head to Ryeheart. "Travel safely."

As the ThunderClan, RiverClan, and SkyClan medicine cats began to leave, Hawkfeather looked at Silverberry. "May StarClan light your path," He meowed. "And yours, Starpaw."

"Thank you." She dipped her head and turned to Dewpaw. "Take care."

The spotted gray tom nodded. "Thanks. You too."

With a last look at each other, they began heading their separate ways. Starpaw felt warm as she and Silverberry began making the journey home. *Meeting StarClan was more amazing than I could have imagined. There's nothing better than being a medicine cat!*

Chapter 3

"Very good! Now which one is borage?"

Starpaw sat in the medicine den, her fluffy tail twitching slowly as she studied the leaves in front of her. Silverberry had set out three, and each looked different. *I know this...* She lowered her head and sniffed at one of the leaves, picking up a strong, sweet scent. "This one is chervil," She meowed confidently.

Her mentor nodded approvingly. "And what about the other two?"

Borage... Borage... Starpaw looked down thoughtfully. *I know this, I just can't quite...* Her ears pricked forward as she remembered something and pointed to the larger leaf with her paw. "That's dock, isn't it?" She asked. "I remember you gave some to Wetbelly for his sore pads after the gathering. And the last leaf is borage then."

"That's right," Silverberry meowed. "Dock leaves can also be chewed up and used for scratches." She looked down at the leaf Starpaw had identified as borage. "You can recognize borage by it's hairy leaves, and the strong scent it has."

That's right. Starpaw nodded, feeling dumb. *I should have remembered that!*

"And what is borage used for?" The silver she-cat prompted next.

She was able to answer immediately. "It helps queens produce milk," She meowed. "But I think it has other uses too."

Silverberry began gathering the leaves and returned them to their piles at the side of the den. "Yes, it can be used to sooth bellyaches and bring down fevers."

She stood up and followed her mentor, her tail twitching uneasily. "Am I doing well?" She asked nervously. "Should I have known that?"

She'd been a medicine cat apprentice for two moons now. The training was more than she'd been expecting. She'd had no idea just how many herbs and remedies there were. It was truly amazing that the forest offered so many plants that could cure just about anything. *It's a gift from StarClan.* The thought warmed her. *They've given us a wonderful home filled with prey and herbs. Everything we could ever need.*

The silver she-cat turned to her and purred. "Starpaw, you're a very fast learner, faster than I ever was. You're doing excellent."

I am? Starpaw's tail curled with happiness. "Thank you! I-"

"Silverberry?"

They turned to see Driftrunner standing by the entrance of the den, his front right paw raised. "What happened?" Silverberry prompted.

"I was chasing a rabbit, and I didn't see the rabbit hole in front of me..." He looked embarrassed as he limped into the den, and Silverberry stepped forward to meet him. "I tripped and sprained my paw."

The medicine cat shook her head in mild amusement. "How many times have you been told to watch where you're going?" She asked. "I know you're one of the fastest cats in WindClan, but sometimes you need to slow down!"

"I know." Driftrunner sat down and licked his golden chest fur awkwardly. "I'm sorry, I was just so focused on the hunt."

Silverberry sniffed his paw and studied it. "It's nothing to worry about. Starpaw, will you fetch me some elder leaves?"

Elder leaves are for sprains. She nodded and turned to the herb stash, studying the different piles. *Borage, chervil, comfrey... elder!* She carefully grasped a few of the leaves in her teeth and hurried back to her mentor, who took them from her and carefully began chewing the leaves into a poultice.

As she began applying the leaves to Driftrunner's paw, he winced, and Starpaw started in alarm. "He's hurt! Should I get poppy seeds?"

"No, the elder leaves will take care of that," Silverberry assured her as she plastered the leaves around his paw. "You're not in a lot of pain, are you, Driftrunner?"

The black and gold warrior shook his head. "It's not too bad, I think I'll manage."

Starpaw relaxed and sat back down, a bit embarrassed at herself. *I don't like to see any cat in pain. Even if it's just a little.*

When Silverberry finished, she sat up. "Alright, you should feel better in a couple of days. You just need to rest your paw until it heals. Until then, I'll tell Monarchwing to keep you off patrols."

"Aww," Driftrunner's amber eyes flashed with disappointment. No warrior loved racing around the moor more than he did. "Alright, I suppose you know best. What about Petalpaw?"

"I assume Gladestar will have her train with Firetail and Blazingpaw until you've recovered," Silverberry told him. "She'll be alright."

Starpaw's littermates had been doing well in their warrior training. Though she spent most of her time in the medicine den, she saw them from time to time in the clearing, excitedly telling each other about their training and what prey they'd caught. She missed sharing a den with them and talking to them, but they had chosen different paths. *They're going to be warriors, and I'm going to be a medicine cat.*

She looked up to see that Driftrunner was turning to leave the den. "Thanks Silverberry, Starpaw," He called as he limped out of the den.

When she and Silverberry were alone again, she looked at her apologetically. "I'm sorry I overreacted. I thought he needed poppy seeds."

"Don't be sorry," She assured her. "You were worried. Seeing a cat in pain is never easy." Her green eyes were warm. "You have a natural instinct to help others, and that is what a true medicine cat needs."

A true medicine cat... She felt honored by her praise. "Thank you,"

She purred, shuffling her paws. "I-I'm trying my best."

"I know you are." Silverberry purred and looked past her at the herb stock. "We're running low on goldenrod," She observed. "Would you go and collect some?"

"Of course," Starpaw nodded, glad at the chance to leave the medicine den. *I could use some fresh air and open sky around me.* She padded past her mentor and out into the clearing.

It was a warm, sunny day, and many cats were settled around the camp. Willowtail and Icetail were sunbathing together by the warriors den. They were two young cats who had recently become mates. Icetail rolled onto his stomach and purred, his white pelt glowing in the sunlight. Willowtail looked at him fondly, her eyes half closed and content.

Howlstorm and Dandeliontail were sharing a rabbit near the fresh kill pile. Whitehare ran over and purred a greeting. "It's a nice day, isn't it?" He crouched and picked out a mouse for himself.

"It is," Dandeliontail agreed with a purr. "But it's quite warm. I wanted to go hunting, but most rabbits will be in their burrows." She looked across the clearing where Monarchwing was speaking to Soakedears and Thunderjolt. "Perhaps we can join a patrol at dusk when it's cooler."

Howlstorm nodded. "Yeah, that sounds great." He yawned and arched his back. "This heat just makes me want to lay around all day, but it wouldn't be fair to everyone else."

It's good to see that they've settled so well. Starpaw thought as she watched the couple. Howlstorm and Dandeliontail had not been born in WindClan. They had been rogues living under the leadership of Bone Shred. After a battle against the rogues at fourtrees, the two cats had been taken prisoner by WindClan. But they turned out not to be bad cats at all. For a long time, many cats in the clan didn't trust them and refused to accept them as warriors. But Howlstorm and Dandeliontail had been willing to go through training and proved themselves loyal WindClan warriors. Now most cats accepted the former rogues as their own clanmates and friends.

"Hey, Starpaw!"

She saw Blazingpaw and Petalpaw sitting by the apprentices den, looking at her cheerfully. With a purr, Starpaw padded over to join them. "Hey!"

"How are you doing?" Blazingpaw prompted, his yellow eyes bright. "We never see you anymore."

Starpaw sat down and purred. "I'm great! Silverberry has been teaching me about every herb in the forest."

"That sounds kind of boring," Petalpaw admitted. "I don't know why you'd want to spend all day cooped up with sick cats. Being a warrior is so much better!"

Blazingpaw slapped her on the shoulder with his tail. "What's wrong with you?" He snorted. "Starpaw likes being a medicine cat, and you like being a warrior. To each their own." He looked at her and purred. "Have you received any messages from StarClan?"

Starpaw didn't take offense to her sister's words. *She just doesn't understand. She's never felt what I feel about StarClan.* In response to Blazingpaw, she shook her head. "I've met with them at the moonstone, but they haven't given me any prophecies or signs yet."

"It'll happen," Blazingpaw meowed sympathetically. "Just wait and see."

I'm not sure if I want it to happen or not. Starpaw thought uncertainly. She'd always dreamed of receiving a message from StarClan. But Silverberry had told her that StarClan usually didn't give any good messages. Most were to warn them of danger. And she didn't want anything to happen to her clanmates.

"I suppose." She paused, remembering why she had left the medicine den in the first place. "Silverberry asked me to collect goldenrod. See you later!"

"Goodbye!" Blazingpaw called as she turned and hurried toward the gorse tunnel, purring a greeting to Jaystreak, who was on guard as she left.

As she ventured away from the camp, she began scanning the grass for goldenrod. *I probably won't find any nearby.* She thought, remembering the last time she'd been out looking for some with Silverberry. She began heading further down the hills, sniffing and looking around for any sign of the tall golden flowers. She was nearing the pine forest when she spotted what she'd been looking for.

Goldenrod! She hurried over the tall grass toward the clump of plants and crouched, carefully nipping at the stalks. *Plenty of it too.* Goldenrod was a very useful herb for healing wounds. Though there was no fighting between the clans at this time, there was no telling when an injury would happen. It was best to be well stocked and prepared.

She carefully rested two stalks of goldenrod in the grass beside her, and was about to reach for another when she saw movement out of the corner of her eye. She looked up and saw a familiar spotted gray tom padding on ShadowClan's side of the border, sniffing at a clump of leaves.

Dewpaw! Starpaw picked up her stalks of goldenrod and padded toward the border. She'd met the fellow medicine cat apprentice many times now. Three times at the moonstone, and at the past two gatherings. He was a very nice cat, and she saw no harm in saying a quick hello. As she neared, Dewpaw noticed her and stepped closer to the border to meet her.

"Hello!" She dropped her goldenrod and meowed a greeting. "How are you, Dewpaw?"

The ShadowClan medicine cat apprentice hesitated, and she was startled to see sadness in his usually bright eyes. "Hi, Starpaw. I'm, well..."

What's upset him? Starpaw grew concerned. She'd never seen him like this before. "Are you alright?" She asked worriedly.

For a moment, Dewpaw didn't respond. He let out a sigh, his tail low. "Things haven't been the best in ShadowClan lately." He admitted. He dropped his gaze and looked at his paws. "Earlier this

moon, Silverblossom died- she's my mother."

"Oh..." Starpaw's heart grew heavy with sympathy. "I'm so sorry." She wanted to touch noses with him to comfort him as she would with one of her clanmates, but wasn't sure if he would welcome the gesture or not. *I know what it's like to lose both parents...* "She's watching over you from StarClan," She murmured, repeating the thought that had comforted her as a kit. "She will always be among the stars of silverpelt."

"Yeah." He was quiet for a moment, looking distant as he stared at the ground blankly. "I know she is, it's just... hard."

Physical pain wasn't the only thing that Starpaw couldn't bear to see. Seeing any cat upset was just as hard for her, especially when that cat was a friend. "I know." Unable to resist her instinct, she reached over the border and rested her paw over his.

Dewpaw blinked and looked up at her, and she drew her paw back awkwardly. "I'm sorry."

"It's okay," He meowed, a flicker of warmth in his eyes. "Thanks, Starpaw. I hope I'll see Silverblossom at the moonstone next quarter moon." He paused for a moment, then went on quietly. "Something very unusual happened a few days ago."

Starpaw sat down and blinked curiously. "What happened?"

The spotted tom sat down, slowly curling his tail around him. "A loner came to us with three of her kits," He began. "Sunflower cared for them in the nursery. But then..." He lowered his voice, his eyes full of unease. "One of the kits killed Snakekit, one of Sunflower's sons."

"What?" Starpaw let out a gasp, her heart skipping a beat. "A kit killed another kit? That can't be!"

Dewpaw shook his head sadly. "It's true. We'd never seen anything like it. The kit's name was Deserve, he ran away. We haven't seen any sign of him, and frankly, no cat wants to find him. A kit who kills has no place in a clan." He paused. "Sunflower is devastated."

She nodded quietly. *I can't imagine...* "What about the other kits?" She asked quietly. "Are they alright?"

"Blackkit and Brownkit are still in shock," Dewpaw meowed solemnly. "They won't leave Sunflower's side. The clan wanted to throw out the other loner kits, Boost and Song, but me and Hawkfeather argued against it. They weren't to blame for what their brother did. They were terrified enough without their mother and Deserve." He hesitated. "Sunflower isn't too fond of them anymore, as you can imagine, so Greenpine has helped care for them."

"That's horrible," Starpaw murmured. "I hope StarClan cares for poor Snakekit."

Dewpaw nodded agreement, and it was silent for a long moment. Starpaw shuffled her paws, trying to think of a way to lighten the mood. "I was just collecting goldenrod," She meowed when she couldn't think of anything else to say. "What are you doing out here?"

"I asked Hawkfeather if I could go out looking for chervil," He meowed, looking relieved to have changed the subject. "I wanted some time alone."

Starpaw's fur prickled with guilt. "Oh, I'm sorry," She dipped her head apologetically. "I didn't mean to bother you."

"No, it's okay," Dewpaw looked up and let out a small purr. "I'm glad I ran into you. I feel a little better now."

She felt her pelt grow warm and let out a soft purr. *There's nothing better than helping others. Not all wounds are on the outside. I like to try to heal the ones on the inside too.* "It's good seeing you in the daylight for once," She joked.

He purred in amusement, then looked over his shoulder. "I'd better get back to camp. Hawkfeather will have my tail if I don't find some chervil."

Starpaw felt disappointed, but understood. "Alright." She paused. "Here, why don't you take this? It's not chervil, but you could use

it." She lowered her head and picked up a stalk of marigold, moving toward him.

Dewpaw hesitated before leaning forward, and she felt strangely warm as his whiskers brushed against hers. He took the stalk in his teeth and set it down in front of him as she took a step back. "Thanks," He purred. "We don't get goldenrod in ShadowClan territory. Are you sure you have enough for yourself?"

"Of course, they grow like dandelions on the moor," Starpaw assured him. "We have plenty."

"Thank you," He purred. "You'd better get back to camp, too." He gazed at her for a moment, then took a step back. "See you at the next moonstone meeting!" He crouched and picked up the stalk of goldenrod.

"Yes," Starpaw purred and started to turn away. "May StarClan light your path!"

Dewpaw, carrying the goldenrod in his teeth, gave her a nod, wordlessly returning the phrase before he hurried away and disappeared into the pine trees.

She stared after him for a moment, then turned away, gathering the rest of her goldenrod. *Dewpaw is a great cat.* She thought, her heart warming with happiness as she thought of him. *If only he were in WindClan. He would be a great friend.*

Chapter 4

A quarter moon shone in the starry night sky. Starpaw padded through the grass alongside Silverberry, looking up at the moon with a rush of happiness. This is my favorite night of every moon. It's so peaceful and comforting to speak with StarClan.

She'd been to three meetings since she'd become a medicine cat apprentice. This would be her fourth. Each time, she was greeted in StarClan by Dreamwhisper, Weaselnose, and Hivepelt, as well as many others she'd met since. At her second meeting, she met Windwhisker and Fallenhope, both warriors who had died during the battle with Bone Shred's rogues. Last quarter moon, she had met Monarchwing's mother, Dappledawn, who was very kind. Starpaw found it incredible that despite having never known some of these cats in the living world, they had become dear friends to her in the realm of StarClan.

Starpaw enjoyed seeing the other medicine cats as well. Silverberry had been right. Before long, she considered them her friends. Otterpelt was caring and wise. Ryeheart was witty and quick to share his knowledge of herbs and give advice to the others. Spicewhisker was the youngest medicine cat, but seemed no less experienced than the others. Hawkfeather was a bit stern at times, but very wise and often kind to his fellow medicine cats. Dewpaw was lucky to have him as a mentor.

She felt closest with Dewpaw. There was no question about it. He was very caring, intelligent, and fun to be around. Starpaw felt that it was their closeness in age and the fact that they were both apprentices that gave them a connection.

As they crossed the thunderpath, Starpaw saw the medicine cats up ahead by mothermouth. She let out a friendly purr when they reached them.

"Greetings." Hawkfeather dipped his head, and beside him, Dewpaw stepped forward to meet her.

Starpaw touched noses with the apprentice. "It's good to see you again," She purred as she stepped back. "How are things in ShadowClan?"

"Much better than they were a few moons ago," Dewpaw told her, looking relieved at this. "Sunflower's kits have started their training."

"Speaking of kits, Willowtail is expecting," Silverberry overheard her and meowed to Otterpelt and Spicewhisker.

The RiverClan she-cat purred. "Icetail is the father, isn't he? I always see them together at gatherings."

Silverberry nodded with a purr and sat down, curling her tail over her paws. "What's keeping Ryeheart?"

"An emergency perhaps?" Hawkfeather frowned. "If he doesn't arrive soon, we'll just have to visit StarClan without him."

It grew quiet as they sat by the mouth of the cave, waiting in the darkness. Spicewhisker looked in the direction of SkyClan territory, while Hawkfeather's tail tip twitched impatiently. Starpaw sat near Dewpaw, who was shifting his paws in the grass restlessly. She raised her gaze to the sky where the stars of silverpelt glittered. *We won't be long, StarClan.* She silently promised.

At last, the SkyClan medicine cat appeared in the distance, padding quickly toward them, and the medicine cats perked up. Hawkfeather rose to his paws. "About time! What kept you?"

"Sorry," Ryeheart panted as he reached them, pausing to catch his breath. "One of the kits had a cough and he was keeping the whole nursery awake. I had to give him some coltsfoot before I left. I came as fast as I could."

"That's alright, Ryeheart," Otterpelt assured him, touching his shoulder with her tail. "Is the kit better?"

"Yes, he stopped coughing and fell asleep," Ryeheart replied with a sigh of relief. He looked toward the mouth of the tunnel, seeming to have recovered from his run. "Shall we go inside?"

The cats began to file into the tunnel. Starpaw and Dewpaw started toward it at the same time, then hesitated. The tunnel was only wide enough for one cat at a time. "Go on," Starpaw prompted.

Dewpaw took a step back and gestured toward the tunnel with his paw, his eyes gleaming. "She-cats first."

She blinked gratefully at him and stepped into the tunnel after Spicewhisker, aware of Dewpaw following her. Starpaw had grown used to the darkness of the tunnel, and it didn't bother her. Instead, she felt safe and comfortable in its dark depths, for it led to the most sacred place in the forest.

As the tunnel opened and let in the glowing light of the moonstone, Starpaw stepped out into the cave, gazing at the gleaming stone for a long moment. Despite having been here so many times now, the moonstone never ceased to amaze her. It was truly remarkable. It was their gateway to StarClan's realm.

"Let's begin sharing dreams with StarClan." Hawkfeather settled near the stone and touched his nose to the surface, closing his eyes. The others began to do the same. Starpaw crouched in her usual spot between Silverberry and Dewpaw, closing her eyes as she rested her nose against the moonstone.

After a few moments, the air warmed around her, and she slowly opened her eyes to find herself in StarClan's hunting grounds. She rose to her paws and gazed around the starlit forest, embracing everything around her. *Whenever I'm in StarClan, I feel... At peace. Like everything wonderful in the world is spreading through my veins like a warm summer breeze.*

She turned and padded slowly through the soft grass, looking around for StarClan cats. She spotted Windwhisker chasing a rabbit and called out to him happily. "Hello, Windwhisker!"

The tabby's tail waved briefly in greeting before he continued, too focused on his hunt to stop and chat.

Even StarClan cats like to hunt. She thought with a purr.

"Hello, Starpaw."

She turned her head quickly at the warm, familiar voice, letting out a purr of happiness. "Dreamwhisper!" She and Weaselnose were sitting by the trees, watching her with glowing eyes. She bounded over to them with her tail high in the air, touching noses with each of them.

"It's good to see you, Starpaw," Weaselnose gazed at her, then exchanged an unreadable look with Dreamwhisper.

She blinked at them and tilted her head. "Is something wrong?"

"No." Dreamwhisper hesitated, her pale green eyes fixed on her. "Starpaw, there's something that we've decided to share with you. I'm afraid it might be difficult to understand, but you must know the truth."

Starpaw's stomach twisted nervously. "What is it?" *A prophecy? Is something going to happen to WindClan?*

Her mother's gentle gaze remained on her as she murmured. "You can come out, Sunripple."

A golden and yellow tabby tom stepped out from the starlit bushes behind her, slowly padding forward to stand on the opposite side of Dreamwhisper. His yellow eyes glowed with warmth, and Starpaw recognized them with a start. *He's the cat who was watching from the bushes when I first visited the moonstone!*

"Hello, Starpaw," Sunripple murmured, his eyes filled with such warmth as though he'd known her his whole life. "I've looked forward to meeting you."

"Hello," She studied him uncertainly, surprised at how lovingly he gazed at her. *Am I supposed to know him?* She picked up a different scent from him, one that she knew very well from Otterpelt. *He's a RiverClan cat! So how can he know me so well?*

Starpaw looked at her mother questioningly, unsure of what to say. Dreamwhisper seemed to be searching for the right words. At last, she spoke. "There was a time when I thought I loved Weaselnose,"

She meowed quietly, looking beside her at the tom, who was looking at his paws. "But once I met Sunripple, I realized that I was wrong. Weaselnose was a great cat, and a wonderful friend. But he was not the cat I loved."

Her heartbeat quickened as she stared at her mother, trying to process her words. "Wait... What... What are you saying?" She whispered, though she thought she already knew where this was going. She only prayed she was wrong.

Dreamwhisper gazed at her, eyes filled with emotion. "Weaselnose is not your father," She murmured. "Sunripple is."

For a moment, Starpaw was speechless. She stared at the three cats before her, the peaceful aura of StarClan gone and replaced with chills of shock. "No..." She whispered. "That can't be!" She looked at Weaselnose pleadingly. "Tell me it's not true!"

The ginger tabby met her gaze, his amber eyes filled with love and sorrow. "I'm sorry, Starpaw," He murmured. "I never knew the truth until I joined StarClan." He looked at Dreamwhisper. "I was angry at first, but over time I forgave your mother."

"I always wanted you to know the truth, and be there for you growing up," Sunripple meowed quietly as he gazed at her. "But being in another clan, there was no way for it to be possible." He looked over at Weaselnose. "I'm grateful to Weaselnose for being the father I couldn't be."

The ginger tom gave him a nod and looked at Starpaw. "I loved you and your siblings as though you were my own, and I still do."

Starpaw was stunned. "But... Why..." She stammered. "I can't believe this!"

"I know it's a lot to take in, Starpaw," Dreamwhisper murmured and licked her head. "But it was time you knew the truth. Sunripple has been longing to meet you, and it seemed cruel to keep him from seeing you in life as well as death."

Sunripple took a step forward as though to nuzzle Starpaw, but

hesitated and drew back, unsure that she would welcome it. "I know it'll take some time," He meowed quietly, his yellow gaze glistening with love as he gazed at her. "But I'd like to be a part of your life. I'm so proud of you, Blazingpaw, and Petalpaw. I have watched over you since you were kits in the nursery."

"But..." Starpaw stared at him for a moment, then looked at Dreamwhisper. "This means I'm half RiverClan!"

"Yes," Dreamwhisper murmured.

A rush of horror flooded over her as she understood what this meant. "B-but that's against the warrior code!" She gasped. "The code that our ancestors created to keep us safe. It's against the will of StarClan to find a mate outside their clan!"

Dreamwhisper's eyes dimmed with sadness. "The code is to keep us safe, and it should be followed," She murmured. "But no code is powerful enough when it comes to love."

As she spoke the word "love", the world began to fade away into darkness. Starpaw opened her eyes and gasped out, finding herself back at the moonstone. She slowly rose into a sitting position, her mind spinning.

I can't believe it... Starpaw was stunned. She felt as though her world had been turned upside down. *I'm half RiverClan... My parents broke the warrior code. They broke the laws that StarClan made! How can-*

"Starpaw, are you alright?"

She broke away from her thoughts and snapped her attention to Silverberry, who sat a little ways away, watching her worriedly. Beyond her, Ryeheart and Spicewhisker were waking up. "Your fur is ruffled." She observed.

She looked over her shoulder and realized she was right. She awkwardly licked her ruffled yellow shoulder fur. "I-I'm fine," She tried to calm herself.

Silverberry looked unsure, but before she could question her any further, Hawkfeather padded over and began speaking with her

mentor.

I don't want to tell Silverberry... Starpaw thought nervously. *What will she think if I'm half-clan?*

"Are you okay?"

She turned to see Dewpaw standing beside her, looking worried. "Yes, I'm..." Anxiety prickled through her pelt, and she let out a sigh. "No." She admitted quietly.

"What happened?" Dewpaw asked. "Did StarClan show you something?"

Starpaw hesitated. "Sort of..." Oddly enough, she realized that Dewpaw was the only cat she felt comfortable sharing this secret with. More so than her own mentor. He wouldn't judge her, she knew that. She rose to her paws shakily and padded toward the edge of the cave, gesturing with her tail for him to follow. *I don't want to risk any cat overhearing.*

She and Dewpaw crouched in the shadows of the cave where the light of the moonstone didn't reach. "Well?" He prompted gently.

"I met with Dreamwhisper and Weaselnose," Starpaw murmured, her heart pounding as she began retelling the shocking truth. "They told me that Weaselnose isn't my father. A RiverClan warrior named Sunripple is."

"A River-" Dewpaw's eyes flashed with surprise. "You're half RiverClan?"

"Yes." Starpaw's heart pounded at the terrible truth. "I don't-"

"Starpaw, Dewpaw!"

Hawkfeather's call interrupted her. They turned to see the other medicine cats padding toward the tunnel. Hawkfeather looked at them impatiently. "It's time to go."

Starpaw's heart sunk as they reluctantly joined the others. Dewpaw looked at her apologetically. "How about we meet at the border

tomorrow night?" He whispered so that the others couldn't hear. "We can talk about it then if you want."

"Okay," She agreed gratefully, then felt her stomach churn nervously. "Please don't tell anyone."

"I won't," Dewpaw promised as they slipped into the tunnel.

Somehow, just those two words comforted her. *I trust Dewpaw to keep it a secret. I don't think I can tell anyone else about this. Not Silverberry, not even Blazingpaw and Petalpaw. No one can know.*

Chapter 5

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey, gather beneath the boulder for a clan meeting!"

Gladestar called from the clearing, catching Starpaw's attention from where she sat in the medicine den, sorting coltsfoot and marigold. Her heart skipped with happiness. *It's time!* She followed Silverberry outside and sat with her just outside the den.

The rest of the clan was gathering before Gladestar, who stood on the boulder, looking down on her clanmates. Thunderjolt and Clovernose sat together in the midst of the group. Firetail and Soakedears spoke to each other, looking amused as if one of them had told a joke. They were certainly the clowns of the clan.

Featherblaze sat near the front of the crowd, looking proud as Blazingpaw and Petalpaw stepped forward. *It feels like yesterday we were being made apprentices.* Starpaw thought as she watched her siblings stand before the boulder, looking up at Gladestar. *And now, they're being made warriors.*

She observed her brother and sister, noticing they were nearly as tall as the other warriors. *We've grown so fast!* The kit fluff was gone, replaced by thick, sleek fur. *Sleek...* Starpaw's heart skipped a beat as she realized this for the first time. *Because we're half RiverClan... I'm sleek, too.*

"Cats of WindClan," Gladestar began, and the cats below quieted. "Our two oldest apprentices have successfully completed their assessments, and it is time for them to become warriors." She looked down at the two young cats.

Blazingpaw stood tall, his yellow eyes lit with pride and excitement. Beside him, Petalpaw's tail was raised high in the air, her eyes glowing. *We all have Sunripple's yellow eyes...* Starpaw realized uneasily.

"I, Gladestar, leader of WindClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on these apprentices. They have trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend them to you as warriors in their turn." She looked down at them. "Blazingpaw, Petalpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your clan, even at the cost of your lives?"

"I do," Blazingpaw meowed, and Petalpaw echoed him confidently.

Gladestar gazed at them proudly as she continued. "Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior names. Blazingpaw and Petalpaw, from this moment on you will be known as Blazinglight and Petalflame. StarClan honors your skill and loyalty, and we welcome you as full warriors of WindClan."

"Blazinglight! Petalflame!" The clan began to chant their names, and the new warriors looked around excitedly.

"Blazinglight! Petalflame!" Starpaw purred and rushed through the crowd to her siblings. She licked her sister's head, then touched noses with her brother. "Congratulations! You two will make wonderful warriors."

A loud purr rumbled in Blazinglight's throat. "Thanks! I hope so."

"And you'll make a great medicine cat," Petalflame purred, her eyes shining at her. "I hope you'll receive your full name soon."

Starpaw shook her head, feeling a pang of disappointment. "Medicine cat training takes longer than warrior training," She meowed. "I think I still have a long way to go."

"Starpaw!" Silverberry called, and she turned to see her padding toward the nursery, waving her tail for her to come.

"I have to go." Starpaw dipped her head to her siblings before turning and hurrying across the clearing.

Silverberry paused outside the den as Starpaw arrived. "I want to check on Willowtail," She explained as she slipped into the nursery, and Starpaw followed.

When they entered the nursery, Willowtail was laying in her nest of moss, her chin rested on her paws. When she noticed the medicine cats, she raised her head and purred a greeting.

"How are you feeling, Willowtail?" Silverberry prompted as she sat in front of the queen and felt her belly, which was beginning to round with kits.

"I feel fine," She replied, looking tired. "Just a bit drowsy."

Silverberry leaned over her and sniffed her flank. "No pain?" She asked, and Willowtail shook her head.

"Is everything okay?" Icetail poked his head into the den, his eyes flashing with worry.

Starpaw turned to him. "Everything's alright," She meowed. "We're just checking up on her." Silverberry glanced over her shoulder, giving her an approving nod.

Icetail relaxed and padded into the den, crouching beside Willowtail. "How much longer until the kits come?" He asked.

"It's very early, Icetail." Silverberry sounded mildly amused. "It'll be at least two more moons."

The white tom nodded and looked at Willowtail happily. "I can't wait. Our kits will be the best in the clan!"

Willowtail purred and turned her head to touch noses with him. "Of course they will."

"We'll leave you two alone." Silverberry dipped her head and turned away as Icetail began to nuzzle his mate's neck fur.

Starpaw followed her mentor out of the den, then hesitated, looking over her shoulder at the happy couple. *Could Dreamwhisper and Sunripple really have loved each other like that when they were from different clans?* She wondered with a stab of despair. *How could they have?*

***

It wasn't long before the sun set, and the sky grew dark, revealing the stars of silverpelt. Starpaw was the only cat left in the clearing, eating a rabbit from the fresh kill pile. As she gulped down the last of the meat, she looked toward the gorse tunnel. *It's time to meet Dewpaw.* She rose to her paws, licking her lips before she padded over and headed through the tunnel.

"Starpaw?"

She nearly jumped out of her fur and turned to see Blazinglight sitting beside the mouth of the gorse tunnel. On the opposite side was Petalflame. Starpaw remembered that as newly named warriors, they needed to guard the camp in silence for the whole night.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to-" Blazinglight began.

Petalflame leaped over and slapped her tail over his mouth, shooting him a glare. Blazinglight's yellow eyes grew wide with alarm as he realized he had broken his silence, and the night had only just begun.

As Petalflame sat back down, narrowing her eyes at her brother, Starpaw couldn't help but chuckle. "It's alright, I won't tell anyone you spoke," She promised, and Blazinglight relaxed. "I'm just going out to collect herbs."

Petalflame tilted her head, and Starpaw imagined what she wanted to ask. *In the night? Why? Are you crazy?* But her sister simply shrugged and nodded.

Starpaw padded away from the camp and continued across the moor toward ShadowClan territory. Ever since last night when she'd learned the truth about her father, she couldn't stop thinking about it. Everything felt wrong and confusing. She hoped that talking to Dewpaw about it would put her at ease.

As she neared the dark treeline, she hesitated, wondering if any other ShadowClan cats were around. *They probably wouldn't approve of me and Dewpaw meeting. They don't understand medicine cat bonds.* She scanned the undergrowth, staying a little ways back from the

border.

"Starpaw!"

She heard a hiss and spotted Dewpaw's yellow eyes glowing from the bushes. He stepped out, and she padded forward to meet him. "Hello," She meowed quietly.

"Hey." Dewpaw touched noses with her and sat down, looking at her with eyes full of concern. "Are you okay? I've been worried about you all day."

Did I look that uneasy at the moonstone? She blinked at him in surprise. "You have? I'm alright." She sat down and wrapped her fluffy tail around her.

Dewpaw didn't look like he believed her. "I don't know about that. Do you still want to talk about it?"

She hesitated. Now that she was here, she didn't know where to start. She had so many thoughts and emotions spiraling through her like a wild snowstorm, and they needed to escape her. "I... I just can't believe that my mother would take a RiverClan cat as a mate. It's against the warrior code! It's against everything that our ancestors have set down as laws! How can anyone disobey the will of StarClan?"

"There are worse things a cat can do," Dewpaw pointed out hesitantly. "Your mother must have really loved him."

"But she shouldn't have." Starpaw shook her head miserably. "Why couldn't she have loved Weaselnose? I loved and looked up to him so much, but now..." She looked at her paws. "I don't know what to think of him. He's not my kin. This Sunripple cat is, and I don't even know him!"

Dewpaw looked thoughtful. "There's no reason for you not to love Weaselnose, is there? He may not be your real father, but you still had that relationship. Maybe you should get to know Sunripple. You'll meet him every quarter moon, won't you?"

"I don't know if I want to." Starpaw's heart sunk. "I just wish I never

knew the truth. I wish Weaselnose was my father." There was no response, and she assumed that Dewpaw didn't know what to say. "I shouldn't exist," She murmured. "I'm the result of a mistake, a crime against our ancestors, and StarClan means everything to me. How can I possibly honor them while knowing what I am?"

Dewpaw shifted closer to her and rested his tail around her. "There's nothing wrong with you and no reason why you shouldn't exist," He assured her. "I've never met any cat so devoted to StarClan. And if they had a problem with your parents, surely they wouldn't have allowed you to become a medicine cat?"

Starpaw hesitated as she considered this. "I suppose..." *StarClan has always been kind to me. They would have sent a message to Silverberry by now if they didn't want me to be a medicine cat.*

"Come on." Dewpaw gave her a friendly nudge. "You're going to be a great medicine cat. It doesn't matter who your parents are." He paused and looked toward the thunderpath. "I want to show you something I found a few moons ago." He stood and waved his tail. "Follow me!" He raced off.

Starpaw blinked in surprise. "What-" She broke off and ran after him until she caught up to him. "Where are we going?"

"You'll see," Dewpaw meowed as he ran alongside her, looking startled as he began falling behind. "You're fast!"

She let out an amused purr. "I'm a WindClan cat," She reminded him. "You're the slow one."

"Yeah, well, I'll race you to the thunderpath!" Dewpaw purred as he picked up speed. "Then we'll see who's slow!"

Starpaw sped over the grass like a hare with a hoard of enemies at it's tail, and she easily kept ahead of Dewpaw. When they reached the thunderpath, she skidded to a halt and spun to face him, catching her breath.

The ShadowClan apprentice stumbled as he reached her, panting. "Great StarClan, you're fast!"

"Sorry," She purred and flicked his shoulder with her tail. "So what are we doing here?"

Dewpaw padded alongside the thunderpath, sniffing the grass, and Starpaw followed him as he ventured further into the ditch. Eventually they reached a strange black hole, and he looked back at her as he stepped toward it. "Come on."

"Under the thunderpath?" Starpaw's fur prickled uneasily. "Why? Is it safe?"

"Of course," Dewpaw promised. "Don't worry." He padded into the tunnel and disappeared in its shadows.

Starpaw hesitated, but decided to trust him. She followed him into the darkness, blinking a few times as her eyes adjusted to the dark. They were in a dirty, mucky tunnel, littered with twoleg trash. She wrinkled her nose in disgust at the scent. "This is no patch of lavender." She commented. "What could you possibly have to show me here?"

"Believe it or not, something beautiful." Dewpaw padded through the tunnel toward the ShadowClan side, and she warily followed, cringing as the muddy ground sunk under her paws.

He paused and crouched by a pile of strange, broken twoleg objects. Starpaw stepped closer and studied them, puzzled. They looked like little hollow logs made of colored ice, but most were broken with jagged sides. "What are they?" She asked warily.

"Hawkfeather said twolegs drink out of them," Dewpaw explained.

Starpaw tilted her head. "This is what you wanted to show me?"

"Sort of." His yellow eyes gleamed with amusement. "Just watch." He carefully used his paws to gather the broken objects and push them toward the edge of the tunnel, and Starpaw started a little at the strange clanking noise they made. She took a step back. *What is he doing?*

Dewpaw pushed the objects out into a shaft of moonlight and took a step back. Light flashed in Starpaw's eyes, and she shut them,

turning away. "What-" She opened her eyes and gasped.

A rainbow of lights had been cast upon the wall of the tunnel, bathing the once gloomy place in an aura of colors. Starpaw turned fully toward it and took a step back, staring at them in amazement. "Wow!"

"Isn't it cool?" Dewpaw meowed as he stepped to her side, admiring the lights with her. "I found it by accident one day."

"It's incredible!" Starpaw purred. They stayed there for a while, watching the rainbow of lights until they became aware of the passing of time. "We should get back to our camps."

The ShadowClan apprentice nodded, and the two of them padded out of the tunnel. "Thanks for showing me," Starpaw meowed. "That was amazing."

"I thought it might cheer you up," Dewpaw purred. "Are you feeling better?"

Starpaw nodded happily. "I am. Thank you." She enjoyed spending time with Dewpaw. *If only we could see each other more often.* The thought crossed her mind, and she looked at him. "Would you like to meet again tomorrow night?" She suggested hopefully.

Dewpaw's eyes shone. "That sounds great!" As they headed along the border back the way they came, he added, "We can meet around the same place as we did tonight."

"Alright," Starpaw purred, already looking forward to their next meeting. She padded onto WindClan's side of the border and hesitated, looking over at him as he moved onto ShadowClan territory. "Goodbye, Dewpaw!"

"Goodbye!" Dewpaw purred. They gazed at each other for a moment longer before turning and heading toward their own camps.

What a great night. Starpaw thought warmly as she headed through the moor. *Dewpaw is so much fun! I can't wait to meet him again.*

Chapter 6

Starpaw awoke to sunlight shining through the roof of the gorse den, leaking onto the ground in pale glowing dapples. She stretched out her front paws and yawned softly before climbing out of her nest.

"You slept a long time. It's nearly sunhigh," Silverberry spoke, and Starpaw saw her mentor sitting a little ways away from her, organizing herbs. She didn't look up from them as she worked.

Feeling a rush of guilt, she quickly padded over, blinking away sleep. "Oh, I'm sorry!" She meowed, her fur hot with embarrassment. "Did you need me for something?"

Silverberry shook her head as she swept loose catmint leaves into a pile. "Whitefrost was complaining about a bellyache, but I gave her some watermint." She paused and turned to face Starpaw, her green eyes inquisitive. "Why are you so tired? You've been like this for a long time now."

Starpaw hesitated. It had been two moons since she and Dewpaw had spent part of the night under the thunderpath. Ever since, they had been meeting every few nights, sometimes two nights in a row. They would exchange clan news, joke around, race to the thunderpath, and sometimes just lay in the grass and look up at the stars of silverpelt. They had a lot of fun together, and she couldn't deny that he felt like her very best friend. There was no cat in WindClan quite like him, not even her siblings made her feel quite as happy as Dewpaw did.

Few cats her age understood what it was like to be a medicine cat apprentice. Because Dewpaw was one as well, he was easy to get along with and understood everything she would tell him about herbs and StarClan. Talking to Silverberry about these things wasn't quite the same. She was an older cat, and being her mentor was a bit different from being a friend. Starpaw admired and had great respect for Silverberry, but the connection wasn't the same.

Though Starpaw saw nothing wrong with meeting a fellow medicine cat, she decided not to tell Silverberry. *What if she disapproves and stops me from meeting with him?* "I-I've been having trouble sleeping lately," She lied, hoping she sounded convincing. "Remembering all the herbs and remedies is difficult, and I can't help but try to memorize them when I close my eyes. It keeps me awake at night."

Silverberry's green eyes grew soft. "Starpaw, you're a great medicine cat apprentice, and you already know your herbs very well. You have nothing to worry about."

"Thank you." Starpaw awkwardly shuffled her paws, unsure of what to say to change the subject. "I-"

"Silverberry!" An alarmed yowl sounded from the clearing. The medicine cat immediately abandoned the catmint pile and hurried out of the den, Starpaw on her tail.

Several cats were by the gorse tunnel, murmuring to one another anxiously. The medicine cats pushed their way through the crowd and saw Jaggedear and Soakedears with their apprentices, Tornadopaw and Scorchpaw. Starpaw gasped. Both warriors had minor wounds, and Scorchpaw looked unharmed. But Tornadopaw had long slashes across his shoulder and muzzle, and he limped on his right paw.

"What happened?" Silverberry demanded as she crouched by Tornadopaw, and the apprentice staggered, dripping blood onto the sandy ground. Scorchpaw watched him anxiously.

"We were having a training session," Jaggedear explained as he licked a cut in his foreleg. "Soakedears picked up the scent of fox, so we told the apprentices we would go back to camp and report it." He shot a glare at his apprentice. "But *Tornadopaw* decided that he could handle it all on his own and ran off."

Soakedears sat down and snorted. "He's lucky we got there before he got himself killed, taking on a fox on his own like that!"

"It was just a stupid fox!" Tornadopaw hissed, clearly enraged by his

failure. "I could have-"

Jaggedear let out a hiss. "Save it. You disobeyed us and you were foolish. You need to learn how a warrior is supposed to behave." He lashed his striped tail.

Tornadopaw growled, and Silverberry gently nudged him. "Come into my den, I'll have a look at you."

The apprentice grunted and reluctantly allowed himself to lean on her as she led him to the medicine den. Scorchpaw stared after his brother, his front paw raised slightly.

Starpaw noticed blood on his black and ginger fur and sniffed his flank. "Are you alright?" She asked worriedly.

"What?" Scorchpaw blinked out of his thoughts. "I'm fine." His amber eyes were filled with worry. "Tornadopaw will be okay, won't he?"

"Yes, he'll be fine," Starpaw reassured him. "They aren't serious injuries." She turned and started following Silverberry. "You can come with us if you'd like." She was aware of Scorchpaw following her as she padded into the medicine den.

By the side of the den, Tornadopaw slumped into a nest of moss, wincing as Silverberry began to press cobwebs to his wounds. "That hurts!" He spat.

"I know, but it'll hurt a lot more if I don't clean it out," Silverberry told him as Starpaw and Scorchpaw sat near her, looking down at the injured apprentice.

Tornadopaw's black and gray tail lashed as he let her treat him. "A bit of pain is good," He grumbled. "It's how a cat learns."

How can he say that? Starpaw was startled. She looked aside at Scorchpaw, but he had his gaze fixed on his paws, seeming uncomfortable. Silverberry said nothing as she continued pressing cobwebs to his bleeding cuts.

"Tornadopaw?" Driftrunner poked his head into the den, sounding

alarmed. Starpaw remembered that he was Tornadopaw's father. "Is he okay?"

"Leave me alone!" The apprentice hissed, and his father stared at him for a moment before retreating.

Tornadopaw was never a very kind cat, but this is a bit much. Starpaw thought. *What's making him so upset?*

Silverberry sat up when she finished. "You'll be alright," She told him. "Just rest and let your wounds heal." The apprentice grumbled to himself and looked away from her.

Scorchpaw let out a sigh and turned away, leaving the den. With a last glance at Tornadopaw, Starpaw followed him. "Scorchpaw?" She meowed, and he turned to her. "What's going on with your brother?"

After a moment of hesitation, Scorchpaw responded. "He's been acting like this for a while now," He admitted. "I don't know what started it, but he seems to hate everyone." He paused for a long moment, then lowered his voice. "He's said things like, the clans shouldn't even exist."

"What?" Starpaw stared at him in disbelief. "You must have heard wrong."

Scorchpaw shook his head. "I know what I heard." He looked toward the medicine den sadly. "I miss my brother. I'm not sure who that cat is anymore."

***

A few days passed. A quarter moon shone in the night sky. Starpaw paced outside the medicine den, her tail waving excitedly. Tonight the medicine cats would meet at the moonstone. *I haven't seen Dewpaw in days! I wonder how he is?*

Silverberry stepped out of the den, her eyes flashing with amusement when she saw her. "You're excited," She commented as Starpaw stopped pacing and turned to her. "Why? You've been to the moonstone plenty of times."

"Yes- well, that doesn't change how amazing it is," Starpaw meowed quickly. "How could anyone get tired of the moonstone and meeting with StarClan?"

To her relief, Silverberry didn't question her any further, and it was relatively quiet as they made the journey to highstones. When they reached the entrance to the tunnel, the other medicine cats were already waiting. Starpaw perked up when she saw Dewpaw sitting beside Hawkfeather. The spotted apprentice waved his tail at her.

"Are we ready?" Spicewhisker prompted, and the medicine cats padded into the tunnel. When they reached the cave, their fur became pale under the light of the moonstone.

Starpaw padded up to Dewpaw and purred a greeting. "Hello! How are you?"

He hesitated. "Well..."

"ShadowClan could be better," Hawkfeather interrupted, and the other medicine cats looked at him in surprise. "That kit, Deserve, who killed Snakekit? He's older now, and he's come back," He said grimly. "He seems to be out for more blood. Several days ago, he killed Sunflower."

There were gasps from the other medicine cats, and Ryeheart's fur bristled. "Is he after the other clans as well?"

Hawkfeather shook his head. "I don't know if he even knows the other clans exist. Besides, I think he's only angry with ShadowClan."

"Poor Sunflower," Spicewhisker shook his head sadly. "After she took him in and lost her son. She hunts safely with StarClan now."

Otterpelt nodded quietly. "I hope that Deserve won't cause you any more trouble."

"Yes." Hawkfeather hesitated. "There is good news. Poisonedsap is expecting kits."

Otterpelt tilted her head. "Poisonedsap? She's the rogue who joined you after Bone Shred was killed, right?"

"That's right." Hawkfeather nodded. "She's started settling into clan life quite well. Maplefur is very proud. He can't wait to be a father."

Beside him, Silverberry nodded, her eyes warm. "I'm glad to hear it. Howlstorm and Dandeliontail were right. Not every rogue was a bad cat."

The medicine cats began to spread out around the moonstone. Starpaw crouched in her usual spot and turned, surprised to see Dewpaw close to her side, gazing at her. "What?" She purred in amusement.

"Err nothing." Dewpaw looked away in embarrassment.

What was that about? Starpaw wondered. She looked away from him and closed her eyes as she touched her nose to the moonstone. After a few moments, the darkness faded away, and she found herself in StarClan.

She stood and let out a purr, relishing in the feeling of warmth and the soft grass under her paws.

"Hello, Starpaw."

She heard the soft voice from behind her and turned to face the cat it belonged to. Her heart skipped a beat when she found herself face to face with Sunripple. The golden and yellow tom gazed at her with glowing yellow eyes, full of fondness.

"H-hello." Starpaw shifted her paws awkwardly, unable to meet his gaze. *I don't know what to think of him...*

Sunripple's eyes clouded over. "You're uncomfortable around me. That's alright, I can go if you want." He hesitated. "Would you rather see Weaselnose?"

She didn't know how to respond. "No... I mean, I..." She looked down. *I don't really want to see either of them... I have a real father I never knew, and a father that I thought I knew, who wasn't really my father. Which is better?*

"Starpaw?"

She was startled when she was awoken, her eyes snapping open as she found herself on the cold floor of the cave again. She staggered to her paws and turned to see Dewpaw standing in front of her. His paw was raised, and she realized that he had woken her.

"Dewpaw?" She blinked and looked around. The other medicine cats were still asleep, and would be for a while yet. "What's going on?"

The ShadowClan apprentice ducked his head. "I'm sorry for waking you up," He whispered. "But I... I really wanted to talk to you when the others weren't around, and I thought this would be a good chance." He turned away and headed for the back of the cave.

Starpaw blinked and followed him, puzzled. *What is this about? Did something happen in his dream?* They sat facing each other near the wall of the cave, and Starpaw wrapped her tail around her.

"Starpaw, I..." Dewpaw hesitated, his ears flattening as he looked down.

She looked at him expectantly, puzzled as she waited. When he continued to hesitate, she blinked at him. "Go on." She prompted gently. "You can tell me anything, you know."

He raised his eyes to her and swallowed before he murmured, "Starpaw, you're a really great cat, and you make me really happy. I... I've started thinking of you as more than a friend." His voice shook as he spoke. "I'm in love with you."

What? Starpaw stared at him, shock bolting through her nerves like lightning. *He loves me?* With a start, she realized for the first time that Dewpaw might mean more to her than a friend. She thought about him constantly and enjoyed spending time with him.

"Dewpaw, I..." She trailed off as reality sunk in, overtaking the joy filling her heart. *Oh no... No!* She looked away from him, her heart pounding in alarm.

He stared at her worriedly. "W-what's wrong?"

"Everything is wrong!" Starpaw gasped and stared at him, her veins icy with horror. "We're from different clans. That's against the

warrior code! And to make things worse, we're medicine cats! Medicine cats can't have mates!"

Dewpaw stared at her, looking nervous, though he spoke bravely. "I know it's wrong in every way," He meowed quietly. "But... But it kind of feels right, too. No cat has made me feel the way that you do. Why should the warrior code forbid us from loving someone?"

As he stared at her, waiting for a response, Starpaw was frozen. Every hair on her pelt was dying to tell him that she felt the same way. That she wanted to spend every day and night with him. But the feeling was met with fierce panic and her loyalty to StarClan.

"The warrior code is here for a reason!" Starpaw cried, her fur bristling. "StarClan asks us to follow it. We're medicine cats, StarClan trusts us most of all with the clans and the code that they left behind. I will never break it!" With a sob, she turned and ran out of the cave and through the tunnel. Dewpaw lowered his head sadly.

As she fled back toward WindClan territory, her heart felt numb with shock and sorrow. She felt as though she had just given up everything. *No!* She tried to push the feeling away miserably. *I'm a medicine cat. I am devoted to StarClan alone. To WindClan alone. There is no room in my life for a mate. It is not what StarClan intended for us!*

Chapter 7

The WindClan camp was alive with conversation. The day was coming to an end, and most of the clan was in the clearing sharing tongues under the setting sun.

"It's been a very warm day," Dandeliontail commented from where she lay near Featherblaze, stretched out in the sand. "I'm glad it's cooler now."

Featherblaze nodded agreement. "Thank StarClan for that! I thought my fur was going to catch fire."

"Then we'd have to call you Furblaze," The yellow striped she-cat purred, and they laughed together.

On the other side of the clearing, Jaystreak was sharing a rabbit with Jaggedear. "How is your apprentice doing?" The blue-gray and black tom asked after swallowing what he'd been chewing.

"In terms of his health, Tornadopaw is fine after that fox attacked." Jaggedear's voice was full of annoyance. "But he's still as foolish and rude as ever."

Jaystreak rolled his blue eyes. "All young cats are."

"No. I've been a warrior long enough to know plenty of foolish young cats." Jaggedear looked troubled as he spoke. "But none like Tornadopaw."

After a moment of consideration, Jaystreak responded. "I suppose you're right. But he'll have to change when he becomes a warrior. He'll have his assessment soon, won't he?"

"Oh, yes," Jaggedear grumbled and rested his chin on his folded paws. "I can't wait." He flicked his gaze up as Jaystreak stood and padded away. "Where are you going?"

Jaystreak paused and looked back at him. "I'm going to bring a

mouse for Willowtail," He said. "I won't be long."

Outside the medicine den, Starpaw and Silverberry were laying near each other, observing the cats in the clearing. Starpaw watched as Jaystreak picked a mouse out of the fresh kill pile and headed for the nursery with his tail high.

He's a good brother to Willowtail. She thought. *Her kits will arrive any day now.* But the thought didn't warm her feelings as the news of kits should have. It felt like nothing could. It had been two days since Dewpaw had confessed his feelings for her, and she couldn't get it out of her mind. *I need to stop thinking about him. I need to stop meeting with him. I need to get rid of my feelings for him. I'm a medicine cat!* Though she felt certain that her decision was the right one, she was very sad. She wasn't able to escape the feeling of loss and heartache that hung over her like a raincloud.

Beside her, Silverberry let out a content purr. "It's a beautiful evening, isn't it? It's so nice and cool. Much more refreshing than the heat we've had all day."

"I suppose." Starpaw rested her chin on her paws and stared ahead dully. *Nothing has felt beautiful since that night at the moonstone...*

Silverberry studied her closely. "I wish you'd tell me what's troubling you."

That night, Starpaw had run straight back to the medicine den and to her nest before the other medicine cats had even finished sharing dreams with StarClan. Silverberry seemed to have been alarmed to wake up to her absence and rushed back to camp. In Starpaw's misery, the best explanation that she could give was that she'd been very tired and wanted to sleep. Silverberry hadn't pressed her any further, but knew very well that something was wrong.

When Starpaw didn't respond, Silverberry shifted closer to her. "If StarClan gave you a warning about something, you must tell me," She murmured. "We can tell Gladestar and work it out together."

"It's nothing about StarClan," Starpaw replied quietly. "Don't worry, I would tell you if they shared something important." She felt

Silverberry's gaze on her and hesitated awkwardly. "I'm going to sleep now." She rose to her paws and turned to pad into the den.

Her mentor didn't respond as she stared after her, then let out a sigh, returning her attention to the clearing.

Starpaw climbed into her nest at the side of the den and closed her eyes, breathing out a quiet sigh. *Dewpaw doesn't matter.* She tried to tell herself. He doesn't matter. *StarClan does.*

***

"Starpaw."

She blinked open her eyes and found herself in the familiar realm of StarClan, soft green grass under her paws. Before her stood Dreamwhisper, her fur glittering and pale green eyes filled with starlight.

"Dreamwhisper!" She'd never been more glad to see her mother. Next to Dewpaw, she was the only cat that she felt able to confide in.

She stepped forward, and Dreamwhisper rested her chin on her head. "I see that you're troubled," She murmured.

Starpaw hesitated as she pressed her head into her mother's soft chest fur, breathing in her warm, comforting scent. "I won't be for long," She replied quietly. "Once I forget about Dewpaw, I'll be alright."

"Oh, Starpaw," Dreamwhisper took a step back and gazed at her kit sympathetically. "I'm afraid it's not that easy. I was never able to stop thinking about Sunripple. Nothing is more powerful than love."

"StarClan is more powerful than anything!" Starpaw pointed out in despair. "I'm a medicine cat, I must follow the warrior code. No matter how much I love Dewpaw." Her voice cracked with pain as she spoke the last few words.

Dreamwhisper's eyes shone at her, brimming with love and sadness. "Love is a very dangerous path, Starpaw. Along the way, there are

many risks and sacrifices to be made. Even then, you do not know where the path will lead. You simply must decide if the journey alone is worth it.

Her legs trembled as she stared at her numbly. "I don't want to sacrifice my loyalty to StarClan," She whispered. "It means everything to me."

"And what about Dewpaw?"

Starpaw didn't know how to answer that. Before she could reply, Dreamwhisper turned and began padding away. "Wait!" She cried. "Don't go!"

Her mother paused and looked over her shoulder. "Everything will be alright if you follow your heart," She murmured.

A yowling sounded in the distance, and Starpaw froze, pricking her ears forward. *Is a StarClan cat hurt? Is that possible?* She opened her jaws to ask Dreamwhisper.

The yowl reached her ears again, louder and clearer, and she snapped open her eyes, her body jerking as she was startled. She was back in the medicine den, and the yowling had been real. She heard it again and turned her head to see Silverberry scramble out of her nest. "What's going in?"

"Sounds like Willowtail is kitting." Silverberry rushed out of the den without another word, and Starpaw quickly forced herself to her paws and followed, stumbling and drowsy.

It was very early in the morning. The sun hadn't risen yet, and the camp was dark under the deep blueish gray sky. Quite a few cats had been awoken by Willowtail's yowling. Featherblaze and Jaystreak sat outside the warriors den, looking toward the nursery with bleary eyes. Gladestar and Monarchwing were near the boulder, looking relieved to see the medicine cats emerge from their den.

When they entered the nursery, they saw Willowtail laying on her side in her nest, her enlarged flanks heaving as she panted. Icetail

was crouched over her, licking her head frantically to calm her. When he noticed the medicine cats arrive, he looked up at them sharply. "She's kitting!" He gasped.

Silverberry quickly crouched beside Willowtail. "It's going to be alright," She assured the queen, then looked up at Icetail. "You'll need to leave until the kits arrive."

His eyes flashed with protest. "But-"

"Don't worry, Willowtail will be alright," Starpaw meowed, her voice shaking as she stared at the queen. *I've never helped with a kitting before, or even seen one!*

The white tom hesitated, then nodded, shooting an anxious glance at his mate before leaving the den. Starpaw crouched beside her mentor and watched as she felt Willowtail's belly.

"There will be three kits," Silverberry meowed. "You'll need to start pushing, Willowtail."

How does she know how many there are? Before Starpaw could ask, Silverberry turned to her. "Once the kits arrive, we need nip open the sack and lick them dry."

"O-okay," Starpaw replied nervously, watching as Willowtail yowled and pushed. *What if I do something wrong?*

Silverberry rested her paw on the queen's belly. "The first kit is coming," She meowed. "Starpaw, watch what I do."

Focusing on her mentor, Starpaw watched as the first kit slid out into the nest. Silverberry immediately pulled it toward her and nipped the sack open carefully with her teeth. The kit tumbled out, and she began licking it clean. "It's a she-cat," She confirmed. "Starpaw, you get the next one."

She nodded and waited nervously. I hope I do this right! Another kit arrived, and she pulled it close with a shaky paw, gently nipping the sack. The kit fell out, and she started lapping at its fur. "It's a tom," She meowed.

"Well done." Silverberry waited for the last kit. "You're doing great, Willowtail." When it came, she repeated the process and licked it. "It's another tom." She gently nudged he and his siblings toward their mother's belly. "Congratulations, you have three healthy kits."

Starpaw looked outside the nursery. "Should I get Icetail?" When Silverberry nodded, she turned and took a step outside the den. The white warrior was sitting just outside, his tail flicking nervously. When he saw Starpaw, his ears pricked. "Two toms and a she-kit," She told him.

"Really?" Icetail's eyes lit up, and he immediately rushed past her into the nursery. She followed him and sat down beside Silverberry a short distance from the couple.

Willowtail raised her head weakly and purred as he licked her face. "What should we name them?" She murmured. "I want to call the white she-cat Polarkit."

"That's perfect." Icetail stared at the kits, a distant look in his eyes. "How about Graykit for the gray tom?"

She nodded, looking down at the kits warmly as they suckled. "The tabby and white tom can be Thistlekit."

Icetail licked her head, and she purred happily. Starpaw watched them from where she sat, feeling a pang of envy. *That'll never be me and Dewpaw...* She shook the thought away. *The realization only caused her more pain.*

"Come on." Silverberry gently nudged Starpaw. "Let's leave them alone." She turned, and Starpaw followed her out of the den.

Jaystreak looked up from where he sat by the warriors den. "How is she?"

"Three healthy kits," Silverberry purred. "Two toms and a she-cat."

Gladestar waved her tail, gesturing to the medicine cats, and they padded over to meet the clan leader. "All went well with Willowtail's kitting?" She prompted.

"Yes," Silverberry meowed, sitting down. "They-"

A yowl of horror rang out from the nursery, and every cat in the clearing froze, looking sharply toward the den. "What are you doing? Stop!" They heard Willowtail shriek.

Silverberry bolted toward the nursery, and Starpaw forced her stunned legs to move, rushing after her, aware of Jaystreak joining them. When they looked inside the den, they were met with a horrifying sight. Starpaw gasped sharply.

StarClan, no!

Icetail was crouched by the nest, his fur bristling and claws unsheathed. He had his teeth around Graykit's little body, blood soaking around his muzzle. He dropped the limp kit to the ground and staggered, a strange, wild look in his eyes.

"No!" Willowtail screeched in anguish, struggling to her paws, still weak from kitting. "What's wrong with you? Stop!"

"Icetail!" Silverberry leaped at the warrior, but he had already grasped Polarkit in his claws, digging them into her. The medicine cat grabbed Icetail's scruff with her teeth, but he shook her away and snarled as Willowtail wailed behind him and tried to shield Thistlekit, pulling herself forward.

Jaystreak shot into the nursery, his blue eyes lit with rage. "How dare you?" He screeched and lunged for the white warrior, who was reaching for Thistlekit. Icetail yowled as the warrior thrust him to the ground onto his back.

As Starpaw and Silverberry rushed to Willowtail's side, protecting Thistlekit, they looked over at the wrestling toms anxiously. Icetail struggled against Jaystreak, snapping at his neck so fiercely, Starpaw was sure he could kill Jaystreak if he wasn't dodging his teeth. With a snarl, Jaystreak lunged down and sank his teeth into his neck.

Icetail choked out a cry, slowly going limp as blood trickled down his white neck fur. Jaystreak staggered to his paws, panting as he

stared down at the dead warrior.

For a heartbeat, the nursery was silent, all but Willowtail's sobbing. Everything had happened so fast. Starpaw's legs trembled as she stared at Icetail's body in shock. Silverberry seemed just as stunned. At last, her mentor swallowed and looked down at the queen. "Willowtail, what happened?" She rasped.

The queen was sobbing, her tail curled protectively around Thistlekit- her only remaining kit. "I-I don't know!" She cried. "Everything was f-fine, and then he..." She broke down and wailed. "He went crazy!"

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The sun was beginning to rise. Every cat was gathered in the clearing, looking solemn. Silverberry stood on the boulder beside Monarchwing, speaking quietly. "What happened today was a shock to all of us. Before we hold Icetail's vigil, I-"

"Hold on a moment," Jaggedear interrupted, his eyes blazing. "Why should we give him a vigil?" He demanded. "He killed his own kits!"

Several cats murmured agreement, and Starpaw stood from where she sat below the boulder, raising her voice desperately. "StarClan says that every dead warrior is to be given a vigil."

"Even kit murderers?" Howlstorm growled, and the cats around him yowled in support.

Silverberry raised her voice above the others. "Hold on!" She yowled, and the cats slowly quieted, looking up at the medicine cat. "As horrible as this is, we cannot blame Icetail for those actions. It is extremely rare, but toms will sometimes kill their kits because they resemble prey," She explained sadly, looking down. "It's a terrible instinct that they cannot control. The cat that killed Polarkit and Graykit was not the one that we knew. We must remember Icetail for the warrior that he was, not the monster that took over him."

A few cats agreed quietly, but most still glared at the body of the warrior in the center of the camp. After a moment, Driftrunner

stepped forward. "Gladestar, what about Jaystreak?" He glanced over at the blue and black warrior. "He *killed* Icetail. Shouldn't we be concerned?"

Jaystreak bristled. "That cat killed my sister's kits!" He snapped. "He would have killed Thistlekit too if I hadn't finished him. What choice did I have?"

"You could have taken him away until he snapped out of it," Featherblaze murmured. He ignored her.

"That's enough," Gladestar meowed quietly. "This has all been a terrible accident. Neither Icetail nor Jaystreak will be blamed for anything. We will bury Icetail, Graykit, and Polarkit this evening."

As the clan leader paused, they heard Willowtail crying from the nursery, Several cats bowed their heads. Starpaw looked down, her heart aching with sorrow. Poor Willowtail... No cat should have to go through this.

"That is all for this meeting." Gladestar leaped down from the boulder and slowly padded toward her den. Silverberry jumped down after her and padded toward Starpaw, her eyes on the ground.

Starpaw slowly stepped forward to meet her mentor. "It's terrible," She murmured.

For a moment, Silverberry didn't respond. Then she looked up, her expression unreadable. "This is why you've been upset, isn't it?" She meowed quietly. "StarClan warned you about Icetail's madness."

"What?" Shock filled Starpaw's veins like ice. "No! I-"

"You should have told me about it." Silverberry didn't sound angry, only sad and tired. She stared at her with dull, solemn green eyes. "We might have been able to prevent this. Please don't let it happen again." She turned away.

Starpaw stared after her mentor, hurt filling her heart. *I didn't know about this... I did nothing wrong! How could she think that?*

Chapter 8

Starpaw sat inside the medicine den, quietly sorting herbs into piles. She cast a glance at the entrance of the den. Silverberry had gone to collect horsetail, and though Starpaw usually enjoyed her mentors company, she felt glad to have the den to herself. With everything that had happened recently, she needed time alone with her thoughts.

It had been several days since Icetail had gone mad and killed two of his newborn kits. To Starpaw's dismay, very few cats attended Icetail's vigil. Thunderjolt, Darkstorm, and several other warriors insisted that Icetail was a murderer who didn't deserve any respect, even in death. Very few cats forgave him for his crime.

Starpaw had been one of the only cats to spend the night by Icetail's body, along with Silverberry, Gladestar, and Firetail. She knew that Icetail had been a good cat. She had seen him as a loving mate to Willowtail, and a loyal, skilled warrior. He never would have killed anyone, let alone his own kits if he'd been in the right state of mind.

The clan was still very much in shock over the tragedy, but no more than Willowtail. The loss of her kits and mate had deeply effected her. She was often seen shaking in her nest, keeping Thistlekit close to her as though afraid that something horrible would take him from her too. Silverberry and Starpaw had given her thyme multiple times, yet they couldn't tell if it was helping her or not.

"No herb can heal a broken heart," Silverberry had told Starpaw quietly. "Only time can do that for us."

I've never felt so... sad. Starpaw thought as she swept some poppy seeds into a neat little pile, shaking remaining seeds from her pads. *First Dewpaw, and now this... Why are you doing this, StarClan?*

She heard pawsteps and turned to see Silverberry entering the den, carrying several stalks of horsetail in her mouth. She dipped her head to her apprentice as she set them down. "Hello, Starpaw." She

hesitated. "Would you please check on Willowtail while I see the elders?"

"Alright." Starpaw was glad that her mentor hadn't mentioned Icetail and how she believed that Starpaw had foreseen his madness since the day it had happened. I hope she doesn't still think that StarClan told me about it... How could she think that I would hide something so important?

She padded past Silverberry and headed out into the clearing. She heard an irritated hiss and looked across the camp in alarm. Jaggedear was standing in front of Monarchwing, his tail lashing back and forth. He was joined by Soakedears and Scorchpaw, who looked uneasy.

"This is the third time now!" Jaggedear was exclaiming to the clan deputy, his tone edged with frustration. "Tornadopaw just disappears, then returns late at night before I can even train him."

Scorchpaw nodded, his eyes fixed on his paws. "He's hardly around anymore. He's never even in his nest when I wake up," He admitted quietly. "He smells strange now, too."

The clan deputy was looking at the cats thoughtfully. "He is your apprentice, Jaggedear," She pointed out. "You should know where he is at all times."

The tabby warrior let out a snort. "My job is to train an apprentice, not keep a curious kit in line!"

"He's right, Monarchwing," Soakedears hesitantly put in. "I have to admit, I've never seen an apprentice like Tornadopaw. He doesn't listen to any cat. It's not Jaggedear's fault."

Monarchwing let out a sigh. "I suppose you're right. Jaggedear, once he returns to camp, the two of us will have a talk with him."

Where could Tornadopaw be going? Starpaw wondered as she continued across the clearing to the nursery. *Scorchpaw is right. He's acting like a totally different cat.* As she slipped into the den, she heard Blazinglight's meow.

"You need to eat, Willowtail." Her brother was crouched beside the queen, nudging a rabbit toward her. She didn't move and remained curled up in her nest tightly around Thistlekit, who was squeaking and twisting to free himself from her grasp.

She's going to accidentally smother him! Starpaw shot forward and gasped. "Willowtail, you need to-"

The light gray tabby queen glared at her sharply and let out a hiss, her eyes round with fear and defiance. As Starpaw stepped back in shock, Willowtail's fur flattened, guilt flooding over her expression. "Starpaw, I'm sorry! I..."

"It's alright," She responded gently, cautiously padding close to her. "You're afraid of losing Thistlekit, so you're extra protective of him right now. You can't help it."

Willowtail let out a sigh and rested her chin on her paws. "I don't suppose you have an herb for that, do you?"

"I'm afraid not." Starpaw blinked sympathetically. Blazinglight was sitting beside Willowtail, his yellow eyes filled with concern. Ever since the tragedy, Starpaw's brother had tried to comfort the distressed queen. Starpaw couldn't see that he was getting anywhere, but admired her brother's empathy and will to help her through her loss.

Her attention flicked down to Thistlekit, who was trapped behind his mother's tail. "May I check on Thistlekit?" she prompted gently.

The striped she-cat's blue eyes filled with unease as she looked down at her kit. Beside her, Blazinglight gave her head a reassuring lick. "Nothing is going to happen to Thistlekit, I promise. You can trust me and Starpaw."

"I-I know, and I do trust you, but..." Willowtail let out a distressed sigh, shuddering. "I just can't shake the feeling..." She slowly uncurled her tail, and Thistlekit stumbled forward, looking startled and glad to be free to move. "Please be careful with him!" She begged.

"I will," Starpaw promised and crouched in front of Thistlekit, gently pulling him toward her. He looked like a healthy kit. His eyes were still shut tight, and he let out a squeak of protest as she sniffed at his soft kit fur. His pelt was nearly all white like his father's, however his tail was striped gray like Willowpelt's, as well as some markings on his head.

Willowtail's ears pricked up in alarm at Thistlekit's squeak, but Blazinglight gently rested his paw over hers. "He's alright," He promised, then nudged the rabbit closer to her. "Why don't you eat while Starpaw looks at him?"

The queen hesitated uncertainly before slowly taking a small bite out of the rabbit. Starpaw continued studying Thistlekit until she felt certain that he was in good health. "He's a very healthy kit," She told Willowtail as she gently nudged him toward her. "Don't worry, he'll be alright."

Willowtail stared down at her son as he stumbled into their nest and curled up his tiny body against her, purring softly. "He's all I have left..." She murmured, her voice dry with grief.

Before Starpaw could respond, Blazinglight spoke. "You won't lose Thistlekit," He promised softly. "All of WindClan is here to stop anything from even getting into the camp. I'll even stay here in the nursery if you want, to help you protect him."

Willowtail lifted her tired blue eyes to him. "You would do that?" She asked in surprise.

"Of course," He told her. "If it makes you feel like he's safer."

She was quiet for a moment, as though slowly processing his offer. "Thank you, Blazinglight," She meowed quietly. He settled beside her, and the two cats began sharing the rest of the rabbit.

A blind rabbit could see how much he cares about her. Starpaw thought, mildly amused, but also quite proud of her brother. *He loves her. I'm sure that he can help Willowtail more than any herb can.* She felt a pang of envy as she watched them side by side, sharing prey. I'll never be able to do that with Dewpaw.

***

The sun was setting beyond the hills of the moor. Starpaw padded slowly and aimlessly through the thick grass, looking downward. She wasn't sure what she was doing here. She just knew that she had needed to get away from the camp for a while, to clear her head about Icetail's madness and her feelings for Dewpaw.

It's all wrong... She thought miserably. *Everything is wrong.* She raised her head to the sky where the first stars of silverpelt twinkled faintly. "Why did you have to take Icetail, Graykit, and Polarkit?" She whispered sadly. "Why didn't you warn me at the moonstone? We could have prepared. Icetail should have been a great father, and those kits should have lived to become warriors."

The stars gleamed down at her silently, and Starpaw let out a sigh. "Why didn't you warn me about Dewpaw?" She murmured, her heart aching as she spoke his name. "I'm a medicine cat. I'm not supposed to fall in-"

"Starpaw?"

She nearly jumped out of her fur and turned her head sharply, her fur bristling in shock. Several fox lengths away stood Dewpaw himself, looking startled. She realized with a start that she'd ventured right up to the ShadowClan border. *How is this possible? My paws subconsciously took me straight to him!* She stared at him, not knowing what to say. After a moment, she slowly stepped toward him.

"Err sorry, I didn't mean to scare you." Dewpaw shuffled his paws awkwardly as she paused a little ways away from him. His yellow eyes were filled with uncertainty and sadness, and with a rush of guilt, she remembered that they hadn't spoken since that night at the moonstone when she'd rejected him and run off. "How are you?" He asked hesitantly.

Starpaw hesitated as she stared at him. Every muscle in her body and hair on her pelt longed to run to him and nuzzle him as she told him how sorry she was for rejecting him at the moonstone. She wanted to confide in him about her feelings, Icetail's madness,

everything that was troubling her. *But I can't!* She thought miserably. *I can't have a mate! I must stay loyal to StarClan, to the warrior code, to my own clan!*

"I-I'm alright," She lied, the words being dragged out of her, her chest aching as she kept in the truthful things she really wanted to say.

Dewpaw looked as though he didn't believe her. *He knows me too well.* After a moment, he responded quietly. "Is all well in WindClan?"

For a long moment, Starpaw didn't know how to respond to that. "Yes." She said eventually. Shuffling her paws, she added hesitantly, "Willowtail had kits." I'm not going to tell him what happened afterwards though. I don't want to talk about it.

"That's great!" He brightened a little, but the awkwardness between them remained like a thick stream of fog. "Poisonedsap had her kits last night. Their names are Stonekit and Swiftkit." He paused. "Poppywing's are due any day now."

Starpaw nodded quietly. "That's good."

"Yeah."

It grew silent between them, neither cat seeming to know what to say next. Starpaw flicked her gaze to Dewpaw's, feeling a pang of guilt when she saw the sadness in his eyes. *I'm sorry, Dewpaw... I wish things could be different.*

Ignoring the longing tugging at her heart, she gave herself a shake. "I need to get back to camp," She rasped, hoping he couldn't detect the pain in her voice. "Goodbye, Dewpaw."

"Goodbye..." He stared at her with sorrowful eyes, and Starpaw forced herself to turn and begin heading back up the hill toward the camp. She didn't look back to see if he was watching her. She *couldn't* look back.

When she felt sure that she was out of his sight, she shut her eyes and let out a sigh. *Oh, StarClan, help me forget about him. This is*

tearing me apart!

***

A couple days later, Starpaw and Silverberry headed through the dark moorland under the quarter moon. The dark silhouette of highstones outlined against the starry night sky in the distance.

Neither cat spoke for a long time. Starpaw couldn't help but feel nervous about seeing Dewpaw. *What am I going to say to him? I can't exactly avoid him. We're both medicine cats. We see each other more often than any cats from different clans!*

She pushed him to the back of her mind and began thinking about what she was going to the moonstone for. *It's not for Dewpaw. It's to speak with StarClan. I suppose I'll see Sunripple...* She let out a sigh. *Great StarClan, there are problems everywhere I look. But maybe I won't see him. Maybe I'll see Icetail and the kits.*

An uneasy thought struck her suddenly. *Icetail killed two kits... His own kits. Would StarClan allow him to join their ranks?* She looked aside at her mentor. "Silverberry?"

"Yes?" The silver she-cat turned her head toward her as they headed over a grassy slope.

Starpaw hesitated. "Do you think Icetail is in StarClan?" She asked quietly. "After... After what he did?" The idea of one of her clanmates being destined to walk the dark forest split her heart in two.

She grew worried when Silverberry didn't respond right away. Just when she thought her mentor wouldn't say anything at all, she spoke. "I don't know," She admitted, her voice edged with sadness. "StarClan will have judged him. I suppose we'll find out tonight."

It was quiet the rest of the way to highstones. When they neared the tunnel, they saw the other medicine cats up ahead. Her stomach churned as she saw Dewpaw sitting beside Hawkfeather.

When they reached the others, Spicewhisker purred a greeting, and Otterpelt dipped her head. "It's good to see you, Silverberry,

Starpaw."

"How are you?" Silverberry purred, and Starpaw awkwardly stepped to her side. She looked up at the others and tensed, her heart skipping a beat when she caught Dewpaw's eye. She immediately dropped her gaze.

Ryeheart arched his back and stood up. "Let's go," He meowed, waving his tail. "StarClan awaits."

The medicine cats began filing into the tunnel, and Starpaw was glad to be one of the last cats to go, far from Dewpaw. As they stepped into the cave, she felt a warm rush of comfort at the sight of the glowing moonstone. She drew in a deep breath of cool air and exhaled softly. Everything feels alright here.

As the cats headed for their usual sleeping spots around the moonstone, Hawkfeather stood in front of the stone, turning to his apprentice. "Before we begin, I'd like to hold Dewpaw's medicine cat ceremony." He announced, his voice echoing off the walls of the cave.

Starpaw blinked in surprise. *Dewpaw has finished his training? That's great!* Around them, the other cats purred.

"What?" Dewpaw let out a gasp, clearly unaware of his mentor's plan. "Really? I'm ready?" His yellow eyes lit with excitement.

Hawkfeather sat down in front of him and nodded, his yellow eyes gleaming with pride. "You're more than ready."

As the other medicine cats moved closer to Dewpaw, Hawkfeather began. I, Hawkfeather, medicine cat of ShadowClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on this apprentice. He has trained hard to understand the ways of a medicine cat, and with your help he will serve his Clan for many moons."

The young spotted gray tom straightened, his eyes shining with pride and excitement as he took in every word.

"Dewpaw, do you promise to uphold the ways of a medicine cat, to stand apart from rivalry between Clan and Clan and to protect all

cats equally, even at the cost of your life?" Hawkfeather asked.

"I do." Dewpaw meowed determinedly.

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your true name as a medicine cat." Hawkfeather paused as he studied his apprentice. "Dewpaw, from this moment you will be known as Dewstorm. StarClan honors your empathy and devotion, and we welcome you as a full medicine cat of ShadowClan."

As tradition, Hawkfeather stepped forward and rested his chin on the young tom's head, and Dewstorm licked his shoulder in return.

"Dewstorm! Dewstorm!" The other medicine cats called out his name, their meows echoing clearly off the walls of the cave.

"Dewstorm!" Starpaw joined in happily, feeling ready to burst with pride and happiness for him. She found herself unable to take her eyes off of him. *He's a full medicine cat now. He's earned it more than any cat.*

When Hawkfeather stepped back, the newest medicine cat raised his head to his former mentor, purring loudly. He began to look around happily at the others as they cheered his name. When his gaze reached Starpaw's, the joy died from his eyes, replaced with sorrow and longing.

Her spirits immediately sunk, and she looked away reluctantly. *He should know we can't do this.* She thought. *He just took the medicine cat oath. He must put his clan first, just like I must.*

"Congratulations, Dewstorm," Spicewhisker purred. "You'll make a great medicine cat."

Dewstorm blinked as he forced his gaze away from Starpaw. "Thank you," He said quietly.

Hawkfeather gave him a friendly flick on the shoulder with his tail. "Let's share tongues with StarClan. Stormstar and Silverblossom will be very proud of you."

The light of happiness returned to Dewstorm's eyes as he crouched

by the moonstone, and the others did the same.

Starpaw stared at Dewstorm for a moment as he closed his eyes and touched his nose to the stone. There's so much I want to say to him, but it would be wrong to. It would just hurt him more anyway. She closed her eyes, her heart aching as she rested her nose against the moonstone.

When she opened her eyes, the air around her warmed, and she found herself in the familiar hunting grounds of StarClan. She slowly rose to her paws, looking around uncertainly for Dreamwhisper, Weaselnose, or Sunripple. She found herself relieved that none of them were in sight.

I'd rather not speak with them right now. She thought with a flash of guilt. She moved her gaze across the starry forest surrounding her. *I need to know if he's here...* "Icetail?" She called hesitantly, padding forward through the grass. "Icetail, are you here?"

A golden spotted cat raced out of the bushes in pursuit of a mouse, startling her. As he noticed her, he stopped, his pelt speckled with starlight. "Oh, hello, Starpaw!"

"Hivepelt!" She recognized the cat who had been Silverberry's mentor. "It's good to see you." She politely touched noses with him before adding nervously. "Hivepelt, you know about Icetail..?"

The StarClan cat's amber eyes grew solemn. "Yes, I know what happened."

Starpaw grew uneasy, almost afraid of the answer to her question. "Is he... In the dark forest?" She asked quietly.

To her relief, Hivepelt shook his broad head. "No, of course not. His actions were not driven by his true spirit. It was something beyond his control." He paused. "Would you like to see him?" He turned away, and Starpaw followed him through the starlit forest. Eventually, they reached a row of bushes, and he nodded past them into a small grassy clearing. What she saw in it made her heart ache.

Icetail was laying on his back in the thick, starry grass, purring and laughing as Polarkit and Graykit climbed and pounced about him playfully. "Okay, you win!" He chuckled, gently pushing them off and rolling onto his stomach.

"We always do!" Graykit boasted as he pounced on Icetail's shoulders, his short fluffy tail high. "We're the best!"

Polarkit stared at her father eagerly. "This time I'll be the fox!"

There was something unsettling, yet heartwarming about the scene before her. The cat who had gone mad and killed his kits was now playing with them as though nothing had ever happened. In StarClan, they were a family, and they were happy. Starpaw stared at them warmly.

"Starpaw?" Hivepelt looked at her. "There's someone who wants to speak with you before you wake up." Without another word, he began padding through the trees, and Starpaw cast a last glance at Icetail and the kits before following.

The number of trees lessened as they continued, and Starpaw's eyes widened. "Wow..." She breathed.

Up ahead was a river like none she had seen before. The water was clear and blue, each ripple shimmering with starlight. Silver stepping stones peered above the surface of the water. A sparkling bed of reeds lined each side of the river.

"I've never been to this part of StarClan before!" She whispered. "It's beautiful!"

Hivepelt dipped his head. "He'll be here any moment. Take care, Starpaw." He turned away before she could say anything.

Puzzled, Starpaw sat down in the soft grass, curling her fluffy tail around her. *This is different... Who could it be?* She stared across the river.

Just then, a white tom stepped out from the reeds, his fur glittering with starlight. He neatly leaped across the stepping stones, and Starpaw rose to her paws when he reached her side of the river.

The white tom looked at her with shining blue eyes. "Hello," He purred a greeting. "Last time I saw you, you were just a kit. And now you're nearly a full medicine cat. You must be proud."

Starpaw blinked at the tom, studying him. "T-thank you, but I don't believe we've met..." She picked up the scent of RiverClan. *How would I know a RiverClan cat?*

The StarClan warrior dipped his head. "You were only a tiny kit. You probably didn't even notice me." His eyes were friendly. "My name is Iceslide."

"Iceslide?" Starpaw's heart skipped a beat at the name, and she stared at him in amazement. "You're the RiverClan warrior who fought Bone Shred!" Her voice lowered with sadness. "You gave your life for the clans."

The white tom lowered his head. "That's right. But I made a huge mistake that cost the lives of many cats. If I had stayed loyal to my clan, so much loss and pain could have been avoided."

Starpaw understood immediately. "You're saying I need to forget about Dewstorm and stay loyal to WindClan," She murmured. *He's right. I know it's right.*

"No, Starpaw." Iceslide shook his head. "I'll give you the advice that very few cats would give. But I believe in it, and I feel that it will put you on the path that StarClan needs you to follow." His icy blue eyes were fixed on her. "Love is stronger than anything, Starpaw. There is no wrong in it as long as you know where your responsibilities lie. That was my mistake."

She stared at the StarClan warrior as he went on. "You love Dewstorm, and he loves you," His voice grew firm. "No warrior code should get in the way of that. Don't keep your feelings hidden, Starpaw. That's no way to live. As long as you always put your clan first, love is harmless."

The next thing she knew, she was back at the moonstone. She blinked open her eyes and slowly sat up, feeling cold stone under her paws instead of the soft, warm grass of StarClan. She looked

around and saw the other cats awakening, stretching and rising to their paws.

"See you at the gathering, Spicewhisker." Hawkfeather dipped his head respectfully, and beyond him, Otterpelt was speaking with Silverberry.

Love is stronger than anything, Starpaw. There is no wrong in it as long as you know where your responsibilities lie. Starpaw was stunned as she processed Iceslide's words. *StarClan wants me to see Dewstorm... Iceslide thinks it's the right path for me. Surely that means...?*

She looked across the cave and saw Dewstorm speaking with Hawkfeather. *I need to talk to him.* She decided. *I need to tell him.*

The other medicine cats began heading out the tunnel, and Silverberry looked over her shoulder. "Starpaw, we're leaving now."

"I'd like to speak to Dewstorm first," Starpaw meowed, surprised at how clearly and confidently she spoke. As Silverberry's eyes flashed with confusion, she quickly added, "I want to ask about Poisonedsap's kits."

Beyond her, Dewstorm stared back at Starpaw, looking surprised, but he seemed to understand quickly. "Yes, I was going to tell you about them," He meowed, looking at Silverberry. "You go on ahead. We won't keep you waiting."

Silverberry hesitated. "Alright." She looked at Starpaw worriedly. "Be careful crossing the thunderpath on your way back," She urged, then padded out of the cave after Hawkfeather.

As the last of the other medicine cats left, a silence followed. It was just she and Dewstorm now. The ShadowClan medicine cat hesitantly padded over, his fur silver under the light of the moonstone, and she stepped forward to meet him. "Starpaw, I-"

Before he could finish, Starpaw pushed her head forward into his thick gray neck fur. Dewstorm started in surprise, then a purr rumbled in his throat as he rested his head against her neck. She felt a rush of satisfaction and joy as she nuzzled him, something

she'd been longing to do for so long.

After a long moment, she stepped back and stared at him numbly. "I'm so sorry," She murmured. "I was afraid of what StarClan would think. But this is the path that we're meant to follow. I know that now." She thought of Iceslide's words. "As long as we're loyal to our clans, love is harmless."

Dewstorm stared back at her, his yellow eyes filled with hope. "What are you saying?" He whispered.

She gazed at him warmly, her heart pounding rapidly in a mixture of fear and excitement. "I love you, Dewstorm," She meowed softly. "And I need you. We will both be great medicine cats for our clans. We can have both, as long as we're careful and remember where our loyalties lay."

The ShadowClan medicine cat gazed at her happily. "You're right," He murmured and leaned forward to lick her head. "If you say that StarClan wants us to be together, then I believe you. I love you."

Starpaw could hardly contain her happiness as they nuzzled each other under the light of the moonstone. *For the first time in moons, everything felt right. No one else has to know about me and Dewstorm.* She thought. *We aren't doing any harm. We'll be the greatest medicine cats in all the clans, and we'll do it together, by the will of StarClan. Iceslide believes that this is our destiny. And any destiny with Dewstorm is one that I want.*

Chapter 9

The WindClan cats headed across the moor toward fourtrees, their pelts lined with silver under the light of the full moon. Starfaith and Silverberry padded close to the front of the group with Gladestar and Monarchwing.

"It's a bit warmer tonight," Monarchwing was commenting to her leader, her black tipped tail trailing over the grass. "I'm glad I won't be freezing my paws off at this gathering."

Gladestar let out an amused purr. "That makes two of us. Hopefully leaf-bare is a long way off. And let's hope that Strawberrystar is in a good mood." She added, her greenish yellow eyes glinting with amusement.

The orange and black she-cat snorted. "Wouldn't that be a miracle?"

The warm air does feel nice. Starpaw thought as she padded alongside her mentor, looking ahead as they neared the fourtrees clearing. Her heart was even warmer as she thought about seeing Dewstorm. *I can't wait to talk to him.*

It had been a quarter moon since that wonderful night at the moonstone. After listening to the advice of Iceslide, a warrior of StarClan, she had decided to push away her worries and open up her heart to Dewstorm. Almost every other night, she and the ShadowClan medicine cat met in secret, often by the border. Other times they would go beyond the clan boundaries in the hills where no cat could stumble upon them. They would joke around, exchange clan news, and discuss different herbs and remedies. Sometimes they would spend the night laying in the grass together, simply enjoying each other's company.

I love spending time with him. Starpaw thought happily as they reached the clearing. *We're both happy, and we're both staying loyal to our duties. How can that be wrong?* She weaved through the crowd of cats, following her leader toward the great rock.

"Diamondrain is expecting kits," A ShadowClan warrior named Crowmask was meowing, his chest puffed out with pride as Broadwing and Dipfoot congratulated him.

Scorchpaw ran ahead of the group to Rainpaw and Lemonpaw of RiverClan, purring a greeting. Starpaw realized that Tornadopaw hadn't attended this gathering. *I hope he's back at camp and staying there.* She thought.

Monarchwing and Jaggedear had spoken to Tornadopaw about his behavior, but the apprentice hadn't seemed to care for a word they had to say. Just a day later, he had run off again, and Gladestar had ordered him to spend the next moon taking care of the elders.

Her ears pricked forward when she saw Dewstorm among the other medicine cats sitting by the roots of one of the great oaks. She resisted the urge to run to him, aware that she couldn't let any cat see how close they were. She maintained her slow pace beside Silverberry, and Dewstorm's eyes brightened when he noticed her arrival.

When they reached the other medicine cats, Silverberry bumped her head against Otterpelt's in greeting. Hawkfeather was already conversing with Spicewhisker and Ryeheart.

With a friendly purr, Starpaw sat beside Dewstorm, curling her fluffy tail around her. "Hello," She meowed brightly.

"Hello, Starpaw," Dewstorm meowed, dipping his head politely. "How are you?"

She studied him, catching his reserved tone. When they were around the other medicine cats, they couldn't show any affection between them. But they'd always been very friendly. *He's not quite himself...* "Are you alright?" She asked worriedly.

He hesitated, his gray spotted tail twitching uneasily. "I'm fine," He meowed quietly.

He's not fine. What has happened? Her stomach twisted in anxiety. *S*he opened her jaws to question him further, but just then,

Strawberrystar's yowl from above interrupted.

"Welcome, cats of all clans. Let the gathering begin!" The ThunderClan leader announced. The cats quieted below, and Starpaw cast Dewstorm a concerned look before following his gaze to the great rock.

"ThunderClan is very well," Strawberrystar began, her amber eyes fixed down on her clanmates. "We have two new apprentices this moon. Batpaw and Darkpaw!"

"Batpaw! Darkpaw!" The ThunderClan cats started the chant, and cats from the other clans quickly joined in.

Starpaw turned her head and saw the two apprentices sitting side by side, their chests puffed out proudly. Though they were siblings, you couldn't tell by looking at them. Batpaw was lean and smaller than his brother, who had long fur and broad shoulders.

When the cheering died down, Strawberrystar stepped back and looked toward Depthstar. "Would you care to speak next?" She asked, her tone almost implying a challenge.

The ShadowClan leader slowly nodded. "Very well." He took her place at the front of the great rock, his dark blue eyes solemn as he began speaking. "ShadowClan has sad news to share this moon," He meowed quietly.

The cats in the clearing murmured to one another curiously, and Starpaw looked aside at Dewstorm questioningly. But his attention was fixed on his leader, as well as Hawkfeather's.

"A few days ago, one of our queens, Poppywing, was expected to have her kits," Depthstar meowed, his tone low and solemn. "We're sad to say that something went wrong during her kitting, and she died before any kits could arrive."

As the cats below gasped and murmured sympathetically, the ShadowClan leader continued speaking over them. "Her mate, Rainheart, was devastated at the loss. Before any cat could stop him, he chose to end his life by surrendering himself to a fox."

As more gasps and cries of dismay rose from the gathered cats, Starpaw turned to Dewstorm, letting out a shocked gasp. "I'm so sorry!"

She thought back to how Willowtail had lost Icetail and two of her kits not long ago. *At least Willowtail and Thistlekit survived... Everything was lost in the case of Rainheart and Poppywing.*

Dewstorm didn't seem to hear her. He was exchanging a look with Hawkfeather, something unreadable flickering in their dim eyes. The brown spotted medicine cat narrowed his eyes at Dewstorm and shook his head, looking back up at Depthstar.

The death of a queen is a loss for any medicine cat. Starpaw thought sympathetically. *They must feel like they've failed.* She moved closer to Dewstorm and rested her tail around him. He looked away from Hawkfeather and blinked at her gratefully.

"Rainheart and Poppywing were fine young warriors who would have been fine parents," Depthstar concluded, lowering his head. "They hunt safely with StarClan now."

As he stepped back, Frostedstar dipped his head in respect. "I'm very sorry for ShadowClan's loss," He meowed quietly.

"Yes," Gladestar agreed solemnly. "May StarClan light the paths of Rainheart and Poppywing."

Depthstar nodded quietly. "Thank you." He paused before adding, "Despite the loss, ShadowClan remains strong. Bloomfire and Diamondrain are expecting kits, and our apprentices are training well."

As Frostedstar stepped to the front of the rock and began speaking for RiverClan, Starpaw couldn't help but be distracted by Dewstorm. *He still looks very troubled.* She thought. *And there seems to be some tension between he and Hawkfeather. I hope he isn't being too hard on Dewstorm about Poppywing.*

When the gathering came to an end, Gladestar leaped down from the great rock, and Silverberry waved her tail to the other medicine

cats before following.

Starpaw turned to Dewstorm. "I'll see you soon," She meowed, disappointed that they hadn't been able to talk.

"Yeah." The ShadowClan medicine cat hesitated and leaned closer. "Meet me by the border tomorrow at sunrise," He murmured in her ear. "I'll tell you everything then."

She nodded, puzzled, but aware that now wasn't the time to ask questions. She noticed how uneasy he looked and touched her nose to his ear reassuringly before turning and hurrying after Silverberry and Gladestar.

As she headed through the crowd of cats, her mind raced with confusion. *He'll tell me everything tomorrow. What could he mean? What more is there to tell about Poppywing and Rainheart's deaths?*

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The dim light of morning hazed over the WindClan camp, tinting the grass with silver. Starpaw slowly blinked open her eyes and shifted in her nest, flicking her gaze toward the entrance of the den. *It's nearly sunrise.* She thought. *I have to go meet with Dewstorm.*

She sat up in her nest and stretched her jaws in a quiet yawn, looking toward Silverberry. She was still asleep, her silver flank rising and falling slowly. Starpaw stood and cautiously began padding past her sleeping mentor, something she'd become very good at since she started meeting with Dewstorm.

She stepped out of the den, drinking in the cool morning air. She was about to head across the camp when she thought of Willowtail. *I should see how she is.* She changed direction and went over to the nursery, peering inside.

What she saw surprised her. The tabby queen was curled up in her nest with Thistlekit snuggled against her pale belly. Blazinglight was laying against her with his chin rested on her shoulder. All three cats were sound asleep.

Starpaw held back a purr, her heart warming. *I'm proud of my*

brother. I think he's made Willowtail a lot happier since Icetail's death.

She watched the dozing cats for a moment longer before turning and exiting the camp. She purred a polite greeting to the warriors on guard: Thunderjolt and Featherblaze, who didn't question her. It wasn't unusual for a medicine cat to go out early to look for herbs.

She padded through the thick, cool grass, looking up as the first rays of sunlight stretched out over the pine forest in the distance. When she neared the border, she saw Dewstorm sitting in the grass, waiting patiently with his tail curled around him.

When she reached him, he stood up and touched noses with her. "I'm so glad to see you," He murmured. "Are you alright?"

"I am." Starpaw licked his cheek fur, then sat down and looked at him worriedly. "Are *you* alright? What is it you wanted to tell me?"

Dewstorm's eyes flickered with hesitation. "No cat outside of ShadowClan is supposed to know this," He meowed, looking guilty as he spoke. "Depthstar and Hawkfeather would be furious if they knew that I told you. But I trust you, and I need to talk to someone about this. We've always confided in each other before, and it's helped."

"I won't tell any cat," Starpaw promised, growing more and more curious about this secret.

He sat down slowly and lowered his head, then raised his eyes to meet hers. "There is more to Rainheart and Poppywing's story than what was told at the gathering last night," He admitted. "One kit was born before she died."

Starpaw's spirits lifted when she heard this. "A kit survived? That's wonderful!" When she saw how serious and uneasy he looked, she added. "Isn't it?"

"I think so..." Dewstorm hesitated. "He was born covered in Poppywing's blood. And his fur is a dark red." He lowered his gaze. "Hawkfeather believes that it's an omen from StarClan. He's certain that Bloodkit is going to harm ShadowClan one day."

"Bloodkit?" Starpaw echoed with a gasp. "Who- Why would any cat call him that?" The name itself was very foreshadowing in regards to Hawkfeather's supposed omen. It was no surprise that he was worried.

The ShadowClan medicine cat sighed. "I know, it's not an ideal name, especially in his situation. Bloomfire told us that it was Rainheart's last request before he died. She refused to ignore it, and I can't really blame her. He was her brother, and it is his kit."

Starpaw listened silently, deep in thought as he added. "Bloomfire and Flameheart are raising him as their own. Bloodkit will never know the truth about his real parents."

When Dewstorm went silent and stared at his paws, Starpaw sighed. "I'm sorry, Dewstorm," She murmured and placed her paw over his. "Is Hawkfeather sure it's an omen?"

"It's what he truly believes," He meowed quietly, looking deeply troubled. "The moment Bloodkit was discovered, he said that it was an omen. He sounded so sure of himself." He hesitated. "It's deeply effected him. Half of the time, he's talking to me about Bloodkit and trying to figure out ways to prevent him from destroying ShadowClan. He's completely paranoid about it."

Starpaw looked at him thoughtfully. "What do you think about Bloodkit?"

"He's just a kit," Dewstorm meowed. "I don't believe his birth was an omen of any kind. If something so serious was going to happen to our clan, StarClan would have given us a prophecy, or a more direct warning. I believe that Bloodkit is a miracle. We believed Rainheart, Poppywing, and any kits were lost. Yet a life was saved. That's not a bad sign to me." He raised his head and stared at her. "What do you think, Starpaw?" He asked. "You're closer with StarClan than any cat."

She hesitated as she thought about the situation. *It could be an omen... A kit born in blood is very unusual. And if his birth caused the death of his parents, it may very well have been an example, a warning of the further deaths that he will cause.* But seeing the troubled look

on Dewstorm's face kept her from telling him this.

He's stressed enough about this. She thought sympathetically. *I need to help him through this by supporting him. Besides, Dewstorm is a great medicine cat. He would know a true message from StarClan when he saw one. I trust his opinion.*

She leaned forward and rubbed her head against his. "Every medicine cat interprets things differently," She meowed gently, choosing her words carefully. "Hawkfeather has his opinion, and you have yours. StarClan will reveal which one of you is right." She paused. "If you believe that Bloodkit is harmless, I think you're right. What harm could a kit do?"

Dewstorm sighed and leaned against her, and she rested her chin on his head. "I hope I'm right," He meowed quietly. "I don't want anything to happen to my clanmates. And I don't want Bloodkit to become a traitor. He's a survivor. He's meant to become a great warrior."

"He will be." Starpaw reassured him, gently licking his head. "If you believe it, than I will believe it too." As Dewstorm began to purr quietly, she couldn't help but doubt her own words. *I hope so, Dewstorm... What if Hawkfeather is right about Bloodkit?*

Chapter 10

The WindClan camp was shadowy and tinted in a golden hue as the day approached its end. Starpaw was crouched outside of the medicine den, taking small bites out of a rabbit. Her eyes flicked upward toward the sky as she nibbled, watching the sun set in the distance.

Silverberry was sitting beside her grooming herself, her eyes closed as she lapped at her gray forepaw, occasionally swiping it over her face.

The cool air feels wonderful. Starpaw thought contently. *Dusk is the perfect time to relax in the clearing.* She raised her head from the rabbit and gazed around the camp.

Howlstorm and Dandeliontail were dozing outside the warriors den. Beyond them, Featherblaze was cleaning herself. Firetail and Soakedears were having a friendly debate on who the best hunter was.

"Come on out, Willowtail," Blazinglight was urging by the nursery, his yellow eyes bright. "It's really nice outside."

The queen peered out of the nursery hesitantly. "What about Thistlekit?" She asked worriedly. "I can't leave him alone."

Blazinglight stepped closer to the nursery. "I can stay here and watch him," He offered. "You go relax for a while and get some fresh air."

"Well..." Willowtail stared back at him thoughtfully. "Alright." She leaned forward and licked his ear. "Thank you, Blazinglight. I really appreciate you being here."

The golden yellow tom rested his chin on her head. "I just want you to be happy again," He purred softly. "Everything will be okay now."

"I know." Willowtail gave him a nuzzle before slowly stepping out into the clearing, and Blazinglight disappeared into the nursery.

"Are you going to finish that rabbit?" Silverberry's meow caught Starpaw's attention. "You'll need your strength for the journey to highstones tonight."

She hesitated as she sat up, shaking her head. "I'm quite full now," She meowed. "I wasn't very hungry to begin with."

Silverberry studied the rabbit, which was only half eaten. "Are you sure? You should-"

"Will you leave me alone?"

A furious snarl sounded from the apprentices den, and at that moment, Tornadopaw burst out, his thin striped tail bushy with fury.

Scorchpaw followed him out, his amber eyes pleading. "I just want to know where you've been going!"

Every cat's attention had snapped to the arguing apprentices. Howlstorm and Dandeliontail had awoken, looking startled at the sudden snarling. *What's wrong with Tornadopaw now?* Starpaw wondered. *He's still sneaking off?*

"Yeah, well, it's none of your business!" Tornadopaw spat furiously, his yellow eyes narrowed to slits as he spun to face him. "So stay out of it and leave me alone!"

Scorchpaw bristled, looking fed up with his behavior. "I'm your brother!" He hissed. "I'm sick of you acting like you have a thorn in your rump all the time! What's your problem, you dumb fleabag?"

"You shut up!" Tornadopaw screeched and lunged at his brother. Scorchpaw huffed out in shock as the tabby threw him to the ground and dug his claws into his shoulders, baring his teeth. Scorchpaw yowled and tried to kick him in the stomach, but Tornadopaw planted his back paws on his legs and pinned him, screeching as he raised his paw and unsheathed his claws.

He's going to slash Scorchpaw in the face! Starpaw leaped to her paws and looked around anxiously. She longed to help, but she had little knowledge about fighting, and she didn't fancy getting her ears clawed off by Tornadopaw. *Someone do something!*

"Enough!" Monarchwing dashed across the clearing and grabbed Tornadopaw by the scruff, yanking him backwards just as he swung at Scorchpaw. His claws sliced the other apprentice's nose, and he flinched back in shock.

The dark tabby hissed furiously as the deputy dragged him away from Scorchpaw. When she released him, he shook out his fur and glared at her angrily. Back in front of the apprentices den, Scorchpaw slowly rose to his paws, wiping his nose with a black forepaw.

"Get him some-" Before Silverberry could finish, Starpaw had already rushed back into the medicine den. She grabbed a pawful of cobwebs and hurried out and over to Scorchpaw.

The apprentice looked stunned as blood trickled from a deep cut across his nose. Starpaw dabbed at the slit with cobwebs as Scorchpaw gasped. "He *attacked* me!"

"Tornadopaw!" Gladestar fumed as she stalked over to the apprentice, and Monarchwing stood beside her, eyes narrowed. "What in the name of StarClan is wrong with you? You attacked your clanmate. Your *brother!"*

The tabby glared up at her coldly. "I know what I did. I'm not an idiot!"

There were several gasps from the other cats in the clearing. "Did he just say that?" Firetail exclaimed.

"To his own leader!" Dandeliontail's eyes were wide with horror. "Bone Shred would have slashed my throat if I'd spoken to him like that!"

Gladestar's eyes lit with shock, and Starpaw saw her stiffen as she tried to suppress her anger. "Tornadopaw, you need to get yourself

under control," She growled.

"The RiverClan border has been marked, Gladestar." Jaggedear meowed as he padded through the gorse tunnel, followed by Jaystreak, Thunderjolt, and Petalflame. "We-" He broke off when he saw Tornadopaw and the scene that surrounded him. He huffed out a frustrated sigh and stomped over to his apprentice. "Oh, for StarClan's sake, what did he do this time?"

As Tornadopaw glared at his mentor, Monarchwing explained. "He attacked Scorchpaw. It could have been a lot worse if I hadn't pulled him away."

Gladestar glared at Tornadopaw angrily. "You're confined to the camp for the rest of the moon," She growled. "And Jaggedear and Driftrunner will guard you. You'll take care of the elders and not receive any more warrior training until you show us that you're worthy of it."

"I don't care about the stupid elders!" Tornadopaw hissed, and more cats gasped around him. "I don't care about warrior training!" He spun to face Scorchpaw, narrowing his eyes. "And I *don't* care about *you!"* With that, he ran past he and Starpaw into the apprentices den.

The clan stared after him in stunned silence. Gladestar and Monarchwing exchanged a look of disbelief. The clan leader signaled to Jaggedear with her tail as she turned away, and the three cats headed over to the leader's den, surely to talk about the out-of-control apprentice.

Starpaw drew her paw back and saw that Scorchpaw's nose had stopped bleeding. "You'll be alright," She told him. "It might sting for a few days though."

"Thanks, Starpaw." The tortoiseshell tom stared at his brother sadly. "He's beyond help, isn't he?"

She felt a rush of sympathy for him and touched his shoulder with her tail. "Have faith in StarClan. They will set him on the right path. You must focus on your own. Don't let Tornadopaw keep you from

becoming a great warrior."

Scorchpaw didn't look too comforted, but seemed grateful for her words. "Thank you. I'm going to do my best." He looked down. "I just wish that Tornadopaw would too. I always thought we'd be a team. But he hates me."

"He's your brother. He couldn't hate you," Starpaw assured him.

The apprentice stared at the ground. "I don't think that's my brother anymore. There's a darkness inside him." He paused and looked back up at her hopefully. "You're going to the moonstone tonight, aren't you? Would you ask StarClan if he's a bad cat?"

Starpaw hesitated. "Not even StarClan knows all the answers," She told him gently, not wanting to crush his hopes. "And they don't always share the things that they do know. But I will ask about Tornadopaw if you'd like."

Relief dawned in Scorchpaw's amber eyes. "Thank you!" He sighed. "I hope we're wrong about him. I hope he turns himself around."

Me too. Starpaw thought, growing worried as she wondered what StarClan might share with her. *StarClan, please tell me that Tornadopaw will grow out of this, that he will be a warrior. Tell me that he isn't a threat to anyone.*

***

When Starpaw and Silverberry reached the tunnel by highstones, they found that they were not the first to arrive. Ryeheart, Spicewhisker, and Otterpelt sat patiently in the darkness. Starpaw was disappointed to see that Dewstorm wasn't here yet.

"Greetings," Spicewhisker dipped his head as the WindClan medicine cats sat with them. "You had a safe journey I hope?"

Silverberry nodded. "Yes, thank you. How are things in ThunderClan?"

"Not too bad," The black and white tom replied. "Morningmist had a bad cough this morning, but she's feeling much better."

"Did you use bright-eye?" Otterpelt prompted. "I find that it's more effective than coltsfoot."

Spicewhisker nodded. "I tried coltsfoot, but when she continued to cough, I gave her bright-eye. It cleared up quickly."

"I'm glad," Silverberry purred, and it grew silent. She looked toward ShadowClan territory. "Hawkfeather and Dewstorm don't usually take this long," She commented.

Starpaw's stomach churned with worry. *I hope they're alright!* The thought of something happening to Dewstorm tore her heart in half. She pictured him bleeding in the grass somewhere, clinging to life. She shook the thought away. *He's alright. You'll see.* She told herself. *Dewstorm won't be much longer.*

They waited a while longer in silence. When there was still no sign of the ShadowClan medicine cats, Ryeheart spoke up. "Maybe they aren't coming. We should go on without them."

"No!" Starpaw protested. "We can't start without Dewstorm and Hawkfeather. StarClan would want us all to be here."

The other medicine cats looked unsure, and Silverberry looked at Starpaw thoughtfully for a long moment. "She is right," She decided. "Every medicine cat should be here for this meeting."

She relaxed and looked back toward the treeline. *I can't speak to StarClan until I know that Dewstorm is alright.* They continued waiting in the darkness until she saw the shadowy shapes of Hawkfeather and Dewstorm in the distance.

Thank StarClan! Starpaw stood and watched, relieved as the ShadowClan medicine cats joined them. Dewstorm looked tired, but unharmed.

"Sorry we're late!" Dewstorm panted as he stopped beside Starpaw and caught his breath. "Swiftkit had an incident with some thorns. I wanted to give him some poppy seeds before he went to sleep."

"Poor little scrap," Spicewhisker meowed sympathetically. "Is he alright?"

Hawkfeather's eyes narrowed. "He'll be fine. But no cat can seem to agree on who- or what, caused his injuries."

The others exchanged puzzled looks. "What do you mean?" Otterpelt asked.

"Let's go inside the cave now," Dewstorm interrupted, shooting his mentor a hard look. "StarClan has waited long enough."

Hawkfeather glared at him, then relaxed, letting out a sigh. "Dewstorm is right. Let's go."

As the medicine cats began heading through the tunnel, Starpaw wondered what the secret between them could be. Whatever it was, Dewstorm didn't want the other medicine cats to know. *Could it have something to do with Bloodkit?*

As they entered the cave, Starpaw gazed at the moonstone fondly as she did every time she saw it. *It's always going to be beautiful and stunning to me.* She started toward her usual spot.

"Before we begin, there is something that I must do." Silverberry rested her gaze on her apprentice. "Starpaw, your skills as a medicine cat are outstanding. You know more than I could possibly teach you. You have a gift, a connection with StarClan that very few medicine cats are given. I'd like to make you a full medicine cat tonight."

Starpaw's heart skipped a beat as she processed what her mentor was saying. "Oh, Silverberry, really?" She gasped. "Now?"

"Yes," She purred, and the other medicine cats gathered in a small circle around them in front of the moonstone. Starpaw stared at Silverberry, her paws tingling with excitement. Behind her mentor to the right, Dewstorm sat watching her with warm eyes.

It's really happening! Starpaw could hardly believe it. *Tonight I become a full medicine cat.*

"I, Silverberry, medicine cat of WindClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on this apprentice." Silverberry meowed clearly, her voice echoing off the walls of the cave. "She has trained

hard to understand the ways of a medicine cat, and with your help she will serve her Clan for many moons."

Starpaw felt ready to burst with happiness as Silverberry continued. "Starpaw, do you promise to uphold the ways of a medicine cat, to stand apart from rivalry between Clan and Clan and to protect all cats equally, even at the cost of your life?"

She found her gaze drifting to Dewstorm as she took in the words, her heart swelling with love and determination. "I do," She murmured.

"Then by the powers of I give you your true name as a medicine cat." Silverberry paused and gazed at her apprentice, seeming to settle on a name without hesitation. "Starpaw, from this moment you will be known as Starfaith." Her eyes shone with pride. "StarClan honors your faith and loyalty, and we welcome you as a full medicine cat of WindClan."

"Starfaith! Starfaith!"

As the other cats chanted her name, Starfaith stepped forward and let Silverberry rest her chin on her head, purring loudly.

"Well done, Starfaith," Silverberry murmured. "I'm so proud of you."

She licked her mentor's shoulder before stepping back and meeting her gaze. "Thank you for making my dream come true," She purred. She felt pride blazing through her, as strong and warm as the light of the moonstone.

"Starfaith!" Dewstorm purred and joined them, his eyes blazing with pride. "Congratulations!" She could tell that he wanted to say and do more, but couldn't with the other medicine cats here.

She gazed at him happily, wishing she could nuzzle him. "Thank you, Dewstorm," She purred.

The other medicine cats were beginning to settle around the moonstone, ready to share dreams with StarClan. Dewstorm and Silverberry turned away, and Starfaith followed them, crouching between them in front of the moonstone.

My first dream with StarClan as a full medicine cat... She thought happily. She closed her eyes and placed her nose against the cool stone. She felt the cold stone under her vanish, and in its place came soft, warm grass.

She opened her eyes and stood, gazing around the familiar starry forest of StarClan. Almost immediately, several star-pelted warriors bounded toward her above the grass, in slow, dreamlike strides.

Her heart swelled with warmth when she saw Dreamwhisper gazing at her proudly, flanked by Weaselnose and Sunripple. Hivepelt, Icetail, Polarkit, Graykit, Iceslide... They were all there to greet her.

"Congratulations, Starfaith," Dreamwhisper purred softly as she gazed at her kit. "I'm so proud of you. You have completed your training and you have become a true medicine cat."

Hivepelt's voice rumbled on. "All of your ancestors thank you for your loyalty and courage. Your spirit is stronger than many."

"I know you're confused about us now," Weaselnose meowed softly from where he stood, looking over at Sunripple. "But we are both proud to call you a daughter."

"Thank you..." Starfaith breathed, gazing around at the starry warriors. "Thank you. I promise that I will serve my clan well. I'll always-"

Suddenly, everything around her vanished in a flash of darkness, and she let out a startled gasp. She stepped back and looked down, alarmed to see nothing under her paws. She felt nothing but cold air under her pads. Yet she wasn't falling. She saw nothing but pitch blackness.

"Hello?" Starfaith's heart pounded as she blinked, waiting for her eyes to adjust to the darkness, but they refused. Either it was too dark for even a cat to see, or there *was* nothing to see. She was in a dark, empty void. "Dreamwhisper? Hivepelt?"

She was answered by silence. *This has never happened before!* She looked around, beginning to tremble with fear. *Why won't I wake*

up? Where am I? She swallowed and drew in a breath of cold, icy air. *I trust in StarClan. I'm here for a reason.*

Suddenly, something flashed in her vision, and she jerked her head up sharply. A single star was twinkling in the darkness, bright and glowing with a pale yellow aura. *Wow...* She stared up at it in awe and took a step closer, raising her paw. *What does it mean?*

The star suddenly flickered away, then returned. It went back and forth, disappearing and reappearing rapidly. Then suddenly, the star vanished completely, and the darkness was replaced by a pure white light.

What...? Starfaith squeezed her eyes shut at the blinding white void around her, her mind racing as she struggled to understand. A moment later, Hivepelt's voice whispered in her ear.

"A star will die, but leave behind a light."

She woke up with a start, her pelt prickling with fear and unease. She opened her eyes, relieved to find herself back at the moonstone, surrounded by her fellow medicine cats. *A star will die, but leave behind a light...* The prophecy repeated itself in her mind.

Silverberry was sitting up beside her, blinking drowsily. She looked aside at Starfaith and noticed the ruffled fur along her spine. "Are you alright?"

"I'm fine." Starfaith shivered and looked over at Dewstorm, who was slowly rising to his paws. She felt a strange feeling inside her. *There's something I'm meant to do... I'm supposed to be here.* She looked ahead at the moonstone. *Something is supposed to happen...* She felt her paws tingle with the excitement of an unknown purpose. *StarClan wants me to stay here.*

"Let's go," Spicewhisker meowed with a yawn. "We've been here so long, it'll be a miracle if any of us get some sleep before morning."

Hawkfeather and Otterpelt agreed, and the medicine cats headed toward the tunnel. Silverberry noticed that Starfaith wasn't with them and paused, looking back at her. "Starfaith?"

"I need to stay here." She stared at the moonstone.

"What?" Silverberry blinked in surprise. "What are you talking about?"

"Are you okay?" Dewstorm stared at her.

"I-I'm fine, I just..." Starfaith dragged her gaze away from the glowing stone and looked at Silverberry. "I have a feeling that I can't explain. StarClan wants me to be here. I don't know why, but I must stay here. I can spend the night in the cave."

Behind Dewstorm, Hawkfeather snorted. "Do you have bees in your brain?" He demanded. "Get back to your camp and sleep, for StarClan's sake!"

"No." Silverberry stared at her former apprentice worriedly. "Starfaith knows StarClan better than any of us, I dare say. If she thinks they want her to spend the night here, then she must be right."

Otterpelt exchanged a look with Ryeheart. "On your own, Starfaith? Won't that be dangerous?" She asked warily.

Dewstorm took a step toward Starfaith. "I'll stay with her," He meowed. "She shouldn't be here alone."

Behind him, Silverberry shook her head. "I should be the one to stay."

"No," Hawkfeather sighed. "If Starfaith is sure about this, it's no sense leaving WindClan without a medicine cat for the night. You go home, Silverberry." He looked at his clanmate. "Dewstorm, I can manage ShadowClan without you for the night. But you'd better be back by sunrise."

"I will," Dewstorm promised, padding over to join Starfaith.

By the tunnel, Silverberry's eyes glistened with worry. "Be careful," She murmured. "May StarClan be with you. I'll see you in the morning."

The other medicine cats went through the tunnel, leaving Dewstorm and Starfaith alone in silence. After a moment, he looked at her, his eyes full of concern. "Are you okay?"

"Yes, I'm alright," She meowed quietly. "I just know that StarClan wants me to be here... I can't quite explain it, but it's a feeling that I can't ignore." She paused and looked at him guiltily. "I'm sorry. You would be much more comfortable in your nest."

Dewstorm let out a purr. "There's nowhere I'd rather be than right here with you." He leaned forward and rubbed his head against hers, and she purred happily.

"I'm glad you're here," Starfaith murmured and licked his cheek fur.

The ShadowClan tom leaned back and gazed at her, his yellow eyes blazing with warmth and pride. "I'm so happy for you, and so proud of you," He purred loudly. "You're the most amazing cat I've ever met, Starfaith. I love you." He hesitated. "I'm proud to call you my mate."

Mate? Starfaith stared at him fondly. *Are we mates? We're in love with each other, so I suppose we are...* The thought filled her with happiness. "And I'm proud to call you mine. I love you." She gave him a nuzzle before she settled on her stomach and rested her chin on her paws. "Maybe StarClan will tell me more in a dream," She murmured tiredly.

"If any cat knows, it's you." Dewstorm lay beside her, and she felt happiness spread through her at the feeling of his warm body against hers. He gave her forehead a lick before he rested his head down against her shoulder, letting out a sigh of content.

There's nowhere I'd rather be than at the moonstone with the cat I love. She wrapped her tail around him and closed her eyes, letting the sound of his purring lull her to sleep.

Chapter 11

When Starfaith awoke, she was mildly surprised to feel cold stone under her. But after a moment, she remembered everything about the previous night. *I'm at the moonstone.* She felt a warm body against her side and turned her head to look at her companion, her heart warming. *And Dewstorm is with me.*

The gray spotted tom's eyes were closed, his flank rising and falling softly. Starfaith gazed at him for a moment, then looked up at the hole in the roof of the cave, seeing pale blue sky. It's morning.

She dropped her gaze to the moonstone and felt her mind fog with confusion as she remembered the strong urge she had felt last night to stay here. She couldn't recall having any dreams from StarClan. *Nothing happened... But I was so sure... Strange...*

She watched Dewstorm as he slept, her tail still rested over his lower back. She felt warm and safe against him. *I wish I could stay here with him longer.* She thought sadly. *But we need to get back to our camps.*

"Dewstorm..." She whispered and gently nudged his cheek with her nose. "Wake up."

The ShadowClan tom stirred against her and raised his head, blinking drowsily. "What is it?" He murmured.

"It's morning," Starfaith told him quietly. "We must return to our clans." She sat up.

Dewstorm yawned softly and pulled himself up before sitting on the stone floor beside her. "Are you alright?" He asked, his eyes growing worried. "Did StarClan share anything with you?"

She shook her head in disappointment. "No, they didn't," She murmured. "Nothing happened." She dropped her gaze, growing embarrassed. "I'm sorry, you didn't need to stay here."

He leaned closer and licked her cheek fur. "It's alright," He promised. "It was worth being able to spend the night with you."

Starfaith blinked at him warmly and leaned against him as she looked at her paws, deep in thought. "I don't understand," She admitted quietly. "StarClan wanted me to be here... I felt it. It was so strange."

"I don't know..." Dewstorm meowed thoughtfully. "I'm sure you were right. You're never wrong about StarClan." He hesitated. "You told me that StarClan wants us to be together. That it's the right path for us. What if we were meant to spend the night here together?"

She considered this and realized that it was very possible. "You could be right... But then why didn't you have the same feeling too?"

Dewstorm seemed stumped and didn't speak for a moment. "You're closer with StarClan than I am," He pointed out. "I mean, we both are, we're medicine cats. But you're special, Starfaith. Every cat knows that."

"Perhaps..." Starfaith still felt unsure. But Dewstorm's explanation was better than any that she could think of. *He might be right. Maybe StarClan wanted me and Dewstorm to be close. Our love means something to StarClan, or they wouldn't allow us to be together.*

He touched his nose to her ear, sensing her uncertainty. "Are you okay?" He asked softly, sounding worried.

"I'm alright." Starfaith licked his shoulder. "We should get back to our own territories. Our clans need us."

"Yes." Dewstorm agreed quietly, a flicker of sadness in his eyes. She understood why. She felt the same way. *We don't want to be away from each other. But we know that it's where we're supposed to be. Our clans need us.*

They turned away from the moonstone and Starfaith stepped through the dark tunnel, aware of Dewstorm following close

behind. When they emerged on the other side, she had to blink a few times to adjust to the light. The morning air was cool and refreshing, clouds blotting the pale sky.

Dewstorm stepped to her side and looked at her, his expression solemn. She met his gaze for a moment, then leaned against him and pressed her head into his fur. "Thank you for staying with me," She meowed softly. "Shall we meet again tomorrow night at the border?"

"Of course." He rested his chin on her head, and they stayed that way for a long moment before they moved away from each other. "Goodbye, Starfaith." He gazed at her.

Starfaith looked back at him fondly. "Goodbye. May StarClan light your path." She watched him turn and begin heading back toward ShadowClan territory.

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It was brighter when she reached the WindClan camp. She padded through the gorse tunnel and saw that every cat was already awake and being productive. Monarchwing was by the boulder with Jaystreak, Howlstorm, Dandeliontail, and Firetail, likely assigning them to a patrol. Featherblaze was sharing a mouse with Gladestar by the fresh kill pile.

"Starfaith!" Silverberry dashed across the clearing to her, relief flaring in her eyes. "Thank StarClan! I was getting worried."

She purred softly. "I'm alright," She promised.

Silverberry's eyes were still round with worry. "Did StarClan tell you why they wanted you to spend the night there?" She whispered. "Did they give you a-"

"Starfaith! There she is!" Petalflame yowled and bounded over to them. Many other cats noticed her arrival and hurried to greet her.

"You did it!" Featherblaze purred as she and Blazinglight joined the group.

As Petalflame licked her head, Starfaith shrank back, startled as her clanmates surrounded her. "W-what's going on?" She gasped.

Her sister stepped back and looked at her, eyes gleaming. "Silverberry told us that you'd earned your medicine cat name."

"Congratulations!" Blazinglight added, his yellow eyes glowing. "I'm so happy for you. You're going to be a great medicine cat."

Featherblaze stepped forward and dipped her head. "I'm so proud of you," She murmured softly as she gazed at her sister's kit, the kit she had cared for in the nursery. "Starfaith is a beautiful name."

"It was the only name that StarClan would have deemed worthy of her," Silverberry meowed, watching her former apprentice with eyes full of pride and fondness.

Does she really think I'm that special? Starfaith wondered, touched by her mentor's words.

"I have to agree." Gladestar weaved through the crowd and rested her warm gaze on her. "Congratulations, Starfaith," She meowed. "I'm proud to call you my kin and my medicine cat."

Starfaith dipped her head, warm at her leader's praise. "Thank you, Gladestar."

"Dreamwhisper and Weaselnose are very proud of you," Featherblaze paused, then let out an amused purr. "But I'm sure you already knew that. You must see them often."

Starfaith's happiness clouded over at the mention of her parents. *Weaselnose isn't my father.* She thought sadly. *I'm part RiverClan.*

"Blazinglight! Blazinglight!"

She blinked, surprised to see Thistlekit bound across the clearing on short kit legs, his stubby tail sticking straight up behind him. "Can we play?" He squeaked eagerly. "Please!" Willowtail sat by the nursery, watching him warmly.

Blazinglight crouched and let out a purr. "I need to go on a hunting

patrol at sunhigh,"

"Aww!" Thistlekit's tail drooped. "Can't I come?"

"I'm afraid not." Blazinglight gently rasped his tongue over his little striped head. "But how about I bring you back some sheep wool from the twoleg farm? We can play with it when I get back."

The kit let out an excited squeak. "Really? Yay!"

Starfaith watched as her brother gently lifted Thistlekit by his scruff and carried him over to Willowtail. He dropped Thistlekit at her paws, and he let out a delighted purr as he turned and rubbed his head against Blazinglight's foreleg. The warrior gazed down at him fondly.

Thistlekit loves him. Starfaith thought, unable to look away from the heartwarming moment. *And Blazinglight loves him back as though he were his own kit. But they aren't even kin.*

Realization dawned on her, warm and comforting. *It doesn't matter that Weaselnose wasn't my real father. He loved me and cared for me. He was the only father that I ever knew, just as Blazinglight will be the only one that Thistlekit ever knows. Weaselnose was always there for me, and he still is. He will always be my father in my heart.*

She thought of Sunripple and felt her heart ache. *He was my real father, and he never got to know us. He would have been a wonderful father to me if he had helped to raise us. I will never be as close to him as I am with Weaselnose, but I will love him and be grateful to him for giving me life. Perhaps in death, we can form the bond that we couldn't have before.*

She decided to seek out both Weaselnose and Sunripple the next time she visited the moonstone. *I want them to know that I love and appreciate them.* With a purr, she looked away and purred to her kin. "Thank you! I'm sorry, but I need to speak to Silverberry alone."

"Important medicine cat stuff," Petalflame purred. "We get it." She turned away, and the other cats followed.

Silverberry turned and began heading for her den. "Come on, we

can talk in the medicine den."

"I'm sorry to say there's no need," Starfaith meowed quietly, and the silver she-cat stopped, blinking back at her. "Nothing happened."

"Really?" She looked surprised. "I thought you said StarClan wanted you to stay at the moonstone overnight?" She sat down in front of her.

Starfaith sat down and sighed. "Me too," She murmured. "But they never showed me anything. I'm afraid I must have been wrong." *She didn't dare tell her about Dewstorm's theory. No cat can know about us. Not even Silverberry.* "I'm sorry."

"Don't be," Silverberry assured her. "I'm just glad you're alright. I didn't like leaving you alone overnight."

"Dewstorm was with me," Starfaith reminded her. "I was alright."

The medicine cat nodded and rose to her paws. "Is Dewstorm well?" She asked. "I hope he made it back to ShadowClan safely."

"Yes, I'm sure that he did," She meowed, hoping that he was safely back at his camp. "Did anything happen while I was gone?"

Silverberry shook her head. "Everything is fine," She meowed. She paused and gestured with her tail to the fresh kill. "Why don't you get something to eat? You must be hungry."

At the mention of food, she became aware of how empty her stomach was. *I haven't eaten since yesterday before we left to go to the moonstone meeting.* "Alright," She dipped her head to her former mentor and padded over to the fresh kill pile.

"Hello, Starpaw!"

She sat down and watched as Scorchpaw trotted over and dropped a plump mouse on the pile of prey. "I heard you spent the night at the moonstone," He commented.

"That's right," She meowed, aware that she could not give him an explanation for it. A medicine cat's business was not shared with

regular warriors and apprentices. "And my name is Starfaith now," She added, slightly embarrassed to correct him.

"Oh, you got your name!" Scorchpaw let out a purr. "That's great! Congratulations!" He crouched and nudged the mouse he had just brought. "Do you want to have this mouse? It'll be your first meal as a full medicine cat."

Starfaith let out an amused purr. "Thank you, but surely you should give it to Willowtail or the elders?"

The tortoiseshell apprentice shook his head. "Nope, they've already eaten. This one is all yours."

"Well, thank you, Scorchpaw," She meowed and pulled the mouse toward her, crouching and taking a bite out of it.

As she ate, Scorchpaw crouched beside her, seeming hesitant. "I'm sorry if I'm bothering you, but what did StarClan say about Tornadopaw?" He asked quietly.

Tornadopaw! Starfaith's heart skipped a beat when she realized that she had forgotten all about her promise to mention the out-of-control apprentice to StarClan. Her stomach twisted with guilt. *Oh, how could I forget?* But remembering how she'd only seen StarClan for a short time before they'd shown her the dying star, she realized that there wouldn't have been time to speak to anyone about Tornadopaw even if she had remembered.

She swallowed what she'd been chewing and met Scorchpaw's nervous gaze. "I'm very sorry, Scorchpaw, I completely forgot," She admitted guiltily. "And my dream with StarClan was shorter than usual. I'm afraid there wouldn't have been time."

"Oh, that's okay." Scorchpaw looked strangely relieved. "I'm sure you have more important things on your mind."

Starfaith shook her head. "I should have remembered," She said apologetically. As Scorchpaw looked down, she added gently, "If Tornadopaw was a threat, StarClan would tell me on their own. That's what they do. They guide and protect us."

"Do you really think so?" Scorchpaw stared at her hopefully.

"I know so," Starfaith told him. "Don't worry." She looked past him and saw Tornadopaw exit the elders den carrying a bundle of moss, his eyes narrowed and his skinny tail lashing. "Tornadopaw is going through a phase. It's not too unusual for a cat to feel rebellious."

Scorchpaw let out a sigh and followed her gaze to his brother. "I hope you're right, Starfaith."

So do I. She thought as she watched Tornadopaw cross the clearing, glaring over his shoulder at Jaggedear. *So do I.*

Chapter 12

A full moon shone brightly in the sky, shedding light on the cats who were gathering at fourtrees. WindClan and SkyClan were the first to arrive. Starfaith sat down with Silverberry by the roots of a great oak, watching as Gladestar leaped onto the great rock and meowed a greeting to Ravenstar.

"Hello," Ryeheart purred and leaned forward to touch noses with each of the WindClan medicine cats. "I hope all is well in your clan?"

Silverberry purred and curled her tail around her paws. "Yes, we are very well. How are things in SkyClan?"

The brown tabby turned his head to look at his clanmates, who were mingling with the WindClan cats and meowing greetings. "One of our elders died, sadly," He meowed. "But besides that, we are well."

Starfaith strained to see over the heads of the crowd of cats in the clearing and brightened when she saw Depthstar arrive with ShadowClan. Cobratail, Hawkfeather, and Dewstorm were close behind him.

As the ShadowClan warriors branched off to speak to the cats already gathered, Depthstar continued through the crowd with his deputy and medicine cats. While Cobratail went to join Snowfalcon and Sandblaze, Depthstar dipped his head politely to Starfaith and the other medicine cats before joining the other leaders on the great rock.

"Greetings," Hawkfeather meowed, glancing over his shoulder. "I don't expect this gathering to last long. It's going to storm." Beside him, Dewstorm sighed and shook his head.

Silverberry blinked. "What do you mean?" She asked, looking up. "It's a clear night."

"Yes," Starfaith agreed, tilting her head. "And it would only storm on a full moon if StarClan were angry about something."

"Exactly." Hawkfeather's eyes were dull and grim as he looked over his shoulder through the crowd. "Like if a future murderer was here, and-"

Dewstorm gave his mentor a sharp nudge with his shoulder. "That's enough, Hawkfeather!" He snapped, and the tabby flattened his ears. "You're being ridiculous."

"Just because you're a young cat doesn't mean you know everything," Hawkfeather retorted, his eyes flaring with frustration. "One day, you'll see that I'm right!" With a growl and a lash of his tail, he padded away to speak to Otterpelt, who had just arrived with RiverClan.

The medicine cats stared after him for a moment, then turned to Dewstorm. "What is he talking about?" Silverberry asked in bewilderment. "Has he gone mad?"

"Pay no attention to him," Dewstorm let out a sigh, his fur flattening. He was clearly very frustrated with his fellow medicine cat. "He's not himself these days. I... I suppose it's age."

As Ryeheart and Silverberry exchanged a solemn look, Starfaith stepped forward to sit close to Dewstorm. She could see right through is lie. *Hawkfeather is still paranoid about Bloodkit.* "Hello, Dewstorm," She meowed quietly.

The gray spotted tom looked at her, and the frustration faded from his eyes. "Starfaith, I'm so glad you're here," He murmured with a glance at Hawkfeather. "He's getting very difficult to deal with."

"I understand." She rested her tail around him and looked behind her at the other cats. "Bloodkit is here, isn't he? He's been apprenticed?"

Dewstorm turned his head and nodded toward the group of ShadowClan cats. "Bloodpaw is there, just behind Greenpine and Cliffshade."

She followed his gaze and spotted the dark red tabby apprentice. He was watching the clan leaders on the great rock, his yellow eyes nervous, but full of interest. Beside him, a black and white apprentice was pointing toward the leaders with his paw, pausing and looking at Bloodpaw occasionally with blue eyes full of patience and happiness.

He seems like any other apprentice to me. Starfaith thought as she watched the young tom laugh with his companion at something he said. "That apprentice beside him is Swiftpaw, isn't it? Poisonedsap's kit?"

"That's right," Dewstorm replied. "They've been friends since they were kits." He paused and returned his gaze to Starfaith, and she looked away from Bloodpaw. "Speaking of kits, my sister, Diamondrain, has had hers," He purred.

Starfaith let out a warm purr. "That's wonderful! What has she called them?"

"Mistykit and Coldkit," Dewstorm meowed, his yellow eyes warm with pride for his sister. "They're both very excited to become apprentices, but they still have a few moons left to wait."

"It's the hardest part of being a kit," Starfaith purred in amusement, and he chuckled.

After a moment, Dewstorm lifted his gaze to the sky. "Anyway, Hawkfeather is talking nonsense. It's a clear night. Just look at all the stars!"

She followed his gaze to the twinkling lights in the night sky, expecting the sight of them to comfort her as it always did. But it sent a chill down her spine as she remembered Hivepelt's words.

A star will die.

The words echoed in Starfaith's mind. For several nights now she had lay awake in her nest, struggling to interpret the prophecy. The words seemed so simple. But their meaning was not.

A star. Something bright, heavenly, a light in the darkness of night.

Could it be a cat? As Strawberrystar sprang up onto the great rock in front of her, she dropped her attention from the stars to the clan leaders, a jolt of dread spreading through her like an icy flame.

A star... The leaders have "star" in their name... Will one of the clan leaders die? She wondered anxiously. *Gladestar is the oldest of the leaders...* She stared at the golden tabby for a moment, then looked toward Silverberry, who was greeting Spicewhisker. *I should talk to Silverberry about it after the gathering.*

"Are you alright?" Dewstorm stared at her worriedly, noticing that she was distracted.

Starfaith returned her gaze to him and hesitated, considering confiding in him about her prophecy. *It might only be WindClan's business... Should I share it with a ShadowClan cat, even if it's Dewstorm?*

"Cats of all clans!"

Ravenstar's call from above interrupted her thoughts, and she looked up at the leaders as he spoke. "Welcome to the gathering. I will begin. The prey has been running well in SkyClan," He shot Strawberrystar a cool glance.

Starfaith hadn't been listening to the leaders conversation while thinking about the prophecy, but she was willing to bet that Strawberrystar had been bickering again. *It happens nearly every moon!*

"We have two new warriors, Goldenmoon and Brackenleaf!" After the cats cheered for them, Ravenstar dipped his head and stepped back. "That's all I have to share. Frostedstar?"

The white furred Riverclan leader stepped forward. "RiverClan is well," He meowed, looking down at the medicine cats. "Otterpelt expects that she will have an apprentice soon. One of our kits has taken an interest in the ways of a medicine cat."

The medicine cats looked at Otterpelt in surprise and interest. A new medicine cat joining them was exciting news.

"Is it Sagekit?" Hawkfeather asked Otterpelt, seeming to have calmed down about Bloodpaw. "You spoke highly of her at the last moonstone meeting."

Otterpelt purred. "Yes. She won't stay away from my den, and I can't keep her away any longer!"

"That's wonderful!" Silverberry purred, her green eyes warm. "Training an apprentice is a great experience."

"I can't wait to meet her," Starfaith purred, and Dewstorm nodded agreement.

As Gladestar spoke, Dewstorm leaned close to Starfaith. "I wish we could see each other more often," He murmured. "I think about you a lot. Yesterday I almost gave Foxtail coltsfoot instead of watermint for her bellyache."

"I've been distracted too," Starfaith admitted, embarrassed. "Sometimes I don't even realize a cat is talking to me. Silverberry tells me to get my head out of the clouds." She hesitated, unease prickling through her fur. "We need to stay focused on our clans, Dewstorm," She whispered. "We can be together so long as we fulfill our duties."

The spotted tom rested his tail around her. "I know," He meowed quietly. "I want to be the best medicine cat I can be. I know you do too."

Starfaith noticed that Gladestar had finished speaking. "Yes, of course," She murmured to him. "Our clans come first. We must not think about each other when our clanmates need us." She looked up as Depthstar took his place at the front of the great rock.

"ShadowClan is very well," Depthstar began. "We have plenty of prey, and plenty of apprentices. Speaking of which, we've made a new apprentice this moon." He looked into the group of ShadowClan cats. "Bloodpaw!"

Icy silence gripped the clearing, and Starfaith watched Bloodpaw as his prideful expression was quickly replaced by dismay. He looked

frozen as the eyes of every cat fell on him. She felt a stab of sympathy for him. *No cat is going to cheer his name.* She exchanged a disappointed look with Dewstorm. *As medicine cats, we can't. Only warriors can start the chant.*

She glanced over at Hawkfeather. The tabby tom was hunched over with his back to the crowd, as though he expected StarClan to strike down the new apprentice with lightning at any moment.

On the great rock, the leaders exchanged surprised looks. *"Bloodpaw?"* Frostedstar exclaimed.

"Who named their kit *Bloodkit?"* Ravenstar asked in bewilderment. "That's not a name for a kit."

"Bloodpaw?" Strawberrystar scowled, and stood, glaring at the ShadowClan leader. "Really, Depthstar? You came here a few moons ago with a *Revengepaw!* What kind of names are you giving your cats these days? Has ShadowClan gone rogue?"

They are unusual names... Starfaith thought. *But I know why Bloodpaw has his name. It was not given to make him sound threatening or fearsome.*

Depthstar bristled, then calmed himself and glared steadily at the ThunderClan leader. "Don't question me and my clan, Strawberrystar," He growled. "Perhaps you should start questioning your own clan."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Strawberrystar bristled.

What is Depthstar getting at? Starfaith wondered, glancing beside her at Dewstorm questioningly. He looked uncomfortable, not meeting her gaze.

"Cats of all clans," Depthstar looked away from Strawberrystar and to the cats gathered below. "Several moons ago, one of our warriors, Maplefur, was found dead on ThunderClan's side of the border."

As cats murmured anxiously, Depthstar continued. "I have considered alternatives, but there is no other explanation." He narrowed his blue eyes at the ThunderClan leader.

Strawberrystar's amber eyes lit with disbelief as he spoke. "Are you accusing my warriors of murder?" She hissed.

"Yes," The ShadowClan leader meowed firmly, and the clearing burst into yowls of shock and fury.

"That can't be!" Starfaith gasped and turned to Dewstorm in shock. "Warriors don't kill other warriors."

Her companion's eyes were filled with unease. "He was found in ThunderClan territory," He meowed quietly. "What other explanation could there be?"

She had to admit he was right. But how could any cat break the warrior code in such a way? *Why would ThunderClan want Maplefur dead?*

Oaktuft of ThunderClan leaped to his paws. "That's crazy! What reason would we have to kill one of your warriors?"

"That's what I'd like to know." Depthstar shot back, glaring down at him.

Strawberrystar's fur was fluffed up as she furiously stepped toward the ShadowClan leader. "You must be out of your mind to accuse us like this!" She hissed in his face. "ThunderClan cats do not break the warrior code!"

"One of your warriors must confess." Depthstar lashed his tail as he held her furious gaze. "You've always been too proud of your clan, but you must admit that not all of your warriors are-"

"Don't you dare call my warriors disloyal!" Strawberrystar unsheathed her claws, and Starfaith's blood ran cold in her veins. *They can't fight! This is a gathering!* Suddenly, a horrible thought came to her. *The prophecy! What if Strawberrystar kills Depthstar tonight?* She rose to her paws and stared up at the leaders anxiously.

Dewstorm looked at her sharply. "Starfaith?"

"She's going to attack Depthstar!" She whispered, ready to interfere. She couldn't fight, but perhaps she could reason with the quarreling

leaders before any blood was spilled.

The ShadowClan medicine cat touched her flank with his tail. "They won't, it's alright," He murmured. "Strawberrystar is prickly as a thorn bush, but she won't attack him. She's better than that."

To her relief, Frostedstar stepped between the two leaders. "Enough. This is a truce. There will be no violence." He glared at Strawberrystar, then Depthstar. "Every cat just tell the truth."

"The truth has been told!" Strawberrystar pushed past Frostedstar and glared at Depthstar furiously, her tail lashing madly. "ThunderClan is *not* responsible for the death of your warrior! Understood?" She spat.

Depthstar hesitated, seeing that this was an argument that he couldn't win without a fight. "Very well. Perhaps I was wrong."

"Yes, you're *very* wrong," Strawberrystar glared at him for a moment longer, then spun around. "The gathering is over! I have nothing to say." She leaped down from the great rock and lashed her bushy tail at her clanmates, and they began following her.

The other cats stared after her in amazement. Frostedstar, Gladestar, and Ravenstar exchanged troubled looks before jumping down and calling on their clanmates.

Depthstar huffed out a sigh and leaped down, waving his tail. "ShadowClan, let's go home."

As Hawkfeather padded over to his leader, Dewstorm turned to Starfaith. "Goodbye," He meowed quietly. We'll meet again soon." He touched his nose to hers before hurrying after Hawkfeather.

Starfaith stared after him, growing uneasy as she thought about the prophecy. *Could Maplefur's death have something to do with it? If Depthstar and Strawberrystar go into battle, will one of them die?*

Chapter 13

The sun blazed down upon the moor, the air warm and thick with the scent of green-leaf. Starfaith sniffed at a clump of horsetail and carefully nipped off a few stalks with her teeth. *Thank StarClan, they've grown back quickly since I picked them a few moons ago.* She gathered the stalks with her paw and paused, looking up hopefully toward the treeline not far from her.

There wasn't a cat in sight by the ShadowClan border. Her heart sunk in disappointment. *Where could Dewstorm be?* They had decided to meet by the border at sunhigh. He never came. Three days had passed now, and each day at sunhigh she went out to gather herbs in hopes of seeing her ShadowClan companion. And each day, she was disappointed.

I don't understand... She thought worriedly, staring at the pine trees across the border. *Has something happened to him? Is he sick? Has he decided to stop seeing me?* Each thought filled her heart with fear.

She decided to wait a while longer. She sat down in the warm grass and wrapped her fluffy tail around her, watching the border hopefully. She stayed there for a long time until she heard the meowing of cats in the distance and turned her head.

A WindClan patrol was nearing her, led by Thunderjolt. Behind him trailed Firetail, Whitehare, Wetbelly, and Clovernose. When the patrol got closer, the large black and white tom in the lead blinked in surprise. "Hello, Starfaith. I wasn't expecting to find you out here."

"What are you doing?" Whitehare looked confused. "You look lost."

Starfaith hesitated, realizing how odd she must seem, sitting and staring at the border. "I was gathering horsetail," She purred. "I thought I'd take a moment to enjoy the sunlight."

"I see," Thunderjolt rumbled. "The weather is very nice today." He

looked back at his patrol. "We're going to remark the ShadowClan border," He meowed. "Would you like to tag along?"

Behind him, Clovernose rolled her eyes. "A medicine cat doesn't patrol with warriors. They're too soft for that."

Firetail and Whitehare shot her a startled glare, but the brown and white she-cat ignored him, narrowing her green eyes at her.

Starfaith felt a pang of hurt at Clovernose's statement, but didn't let her see it. She dipped her head politely. "That is true," She meowed. "I have medicine cat duties to fulfill. I'll leave the patrolling to the warriors."

The she-cat didn't respond, and Thunderjolt nodded. "Very well. Take care, Starfaith." As the cats turned away, Firetail waved his tail at her in farewell.

She let out a sigh and crouched, taking the stalks of horsetail in her teeth and rising to her paws. *I should go back to camp. Dewstorm isn't coming today.* Her heart ached as she wondered why. *I already miss him so much.*

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When she returned to camp, she saw Silverberry crouched outside the medicine den, laying out oak leaves in the sun. She crossed the clearing and dropped the horsetail in front of her paws.

"You found some," Silverberry looked up at her. "You took a long time," She commented. "Did you have any trouble?"

Starfaith hesitated and sat down. "No, not at all. I was just enjoying the sun." She noticed worry in her former mentor's eyes and tilted her head. "Is everything alright?"

The silver medicine cat hesitated and lowered her voice. "I saw Otterpelt when I was collecting watermint by the RiverClan border," She meowed. "Spicewhisker told her that ThunderClan was attacked by ShadowClan."

"What?" She gasped, her fur prickling in alarm. A dreadful thought

crossed her mind. "Oh no..." She breathed. "The leaders- are they...?"

To her relief, Silverberry shook her head. "Depthstar and Strawberrystar are fine," She promised. Starfaith had confided her about the prophecy and her fears after the gathering. "But a ThunderClan warrior named Hickoryroot was killed."

"Killed?" Starfaith echoed, startled. "What warrior would kill in a battle?"

The she-cat sighed and shook her head. "It is ShadowClan," She commented. "And they do believe that a ThunderClan warrior killed Maplefur. Perhaps they wanted to make it even."

That isn't right! Starfaith thought in horror. *StarClan would never allow such a thing! Surely Dewstorm and Hawkfeather wouldn't have agreed to it?* She looked down, unsure of what to say.

Silverberry looked up at her sympathetically and rested her paw over hers. "Other clans' business isn't our own," She reminded her quietly. "As horrible as it is, we must protect our own."

"I know," She murmured, though she couldn't shake the feeling of sadness and worry. *It just isn't right...* She felt relieved that she had been wrong about the prophecy's meaning. But now she was even more puzzled than before. *A star will die... What star? Who is it?*

She was about to ask Silverberry what she thought when she heard Tornadopaw's snarl from behind her.

"Give me that!"

She turned to see Tornadopaw rip a small rabbit away from Scorchpaw, crouching and sinking his teeth into it. The black and ginger apprentice stared at his brother in shock. "Hey! I caught that for the elders!"

"So? The young cats need to eat! They're half dead anyway," Tornadopaw grumbled around his food.

Scorchpaw looked horrified. "Are you mad? You're breaking the warrior code. StarClan's rules!"

"Oh, I'm so scared!" The dark striped apprentice snorted in amusement. "StarClan is a heap of mouse dung!"

There were several gasps of horror from the other cats in the clearing. Gladestar's eyes widened from where she lay by the boulder, and she slowly rose to her paws. Monarchwing stepped to her side, and Driftrunner and Featherblaze stared, jaws dropped.

Starfaith's chest tightened in frustration, taken back by Tornadopaw's words. Without thinking, she stood. "You must take that back!" She exclaimed.

Every cat rested their eyes on her, surprised. Starfaith was a very calm, reserved cat. She was polite to everyone she met. She'd never spoke out against any cat so strongly.

"Starfaith?" Silverberry whispered, sounding startled.

She ignored her and stepped toward Tornadopaw. *He needs to learn a lesson.* The dark tabby raised his head from the rabbit, blood and strings of flesh hanging from his mouth. His yellow eyes narrowed. "Why should I?" As he spoke, Scorchpaw stepped back nervously, staring at Starfaith.

"StarClan are our warrior ancestors!" Starfaith meowed, staring back at his cold yellow eyes. "They have guided us for generations. They are your elders, your kin. Why would you dare disrespect them?"

Tornadopaw's face twisted with mockery. "Because they don't exist!" He laughed, licking his lips clean as he sat up. "StarClan is a tale for kits. No sparkling cats are flying around having conversations with you! Medicine cats are either insane or begging for attention. They want to feel special, so they say they can talk to the dead. How ridiculous!"

More cats let out stunned gasps and yowls, and Driftrunner leaped to his paws, staring at his son in disbelief. "Tornadopaw?" He gasped. "Enough!"

Tornadopaw ignored him and glared at Starfaith as his clanmates murmured around him. She could hardly believe her ears. Her pelt

grew hot with frustration toward the ignorant young tom. *How dare he say such a thing!* "StarClan does exist!" She rasped, struggling to hold back her anger. "How could you say those things about your medicine cats?"

"Because it's true," He growled, lashing his tail slowly. "You're nothing but a soft, lazy she-cat who spends her days playing with leaves and talking to imaginary dead cats. Why don't you go run off and be a kittypet?"

Starfaith jerked back a little, taken back by his statement. Before she could respond, Gladestar stood in front of Tornadopaw, glaring at him furiously. "Have you completely lost your mind?" She spat, her fur bristling. "I have never heard of an apprentice so disrespectful!"

The tabby glared at her. "You don't scare me!"

As Starfaith stepped back and slowly sat beside Silverberry, she saw Gladestar snarl and unsheathe her claws, digging them into the ground. The apprentice noticed and unsheathed his own claws, ready for a fight.

Gladestar! She's a leader too! Starfaith started in alarm, thinking of the prophecy. *What if Tornadopaw kills her?*

But Gladestar only glared at the apprentice, her golden striped tail bushy with anger. "Leave my camp!" She hissed. "You are no longer welcome in WindClan."

"No!" Driftrunner shot over to them, his amber eyes wide. "Gladestar, please, give him a chance!" He pleaded.

The WindClan leader turned to him. "He's had plenty of chances, Driftrunner," She meowed in a softer tone. "You know that."

"He's my son!"

"I'm not your son!" Tornadopaw spat and glared at him. "Not to me! I like to imagine my father isn't a weak, dumb rabbit-chaser like you!"

Driftrunner bristed, his eyes lighting with shock and hurt. After a moment, he looked away. "I don't know what happened to you..." He murmured. "But it's clear that you're beyond our help." He turned and slowly padded away, pushing through the crowd and disappearing into the warriors' den. He didn't want to watch his son leave.

Scorchpaw stared after him, then looked back at Tornadopaw numbly. Starfaith felt a rush of pity for him. *He cared so much about his brother.*

"I will never make you a warrior," Gladestar growled, her hard gaze burning into Tornadopaw's. "I exile you from WindClan. Leave and never return."

Tornadopaw stared at his leader for a moment, then sneered. "Gladly, you bag of bones." He spun and stalked toward the gorse tunnel.

"Wait!" Scorchpaw rushed in his path. "Tornadopaw, please!"

"Get out of my way!" The dark tabby spat and raked his claws across his brother's face. Scorchpaw fell onto his side and slumped over as he tried to sit up, blood trickling from the scratches.

Tornadopaw glared at him, then looked back at the others. "My name is Tornadowind!" He sneered. "Because I will destroy WindClan! You'll all pay for your foolish ways." He rested his eyes on Starfaith, narrowing them into fierce yellow slits. *"All* of you will."

A chill ran down her spine as she stared back at Tornadowind. Then with a lash of his skinny tail, he was gone.

The clearing was silent for a moment. As the clan began murmuring to one another in amazement, Gladestar jerked a nod at Monarchwing. "Take out a patrol and make sure he's left our territory."

As the deputy quickly gathered a few warriors, Silverberry glanced aside at Starfaith. "Well done," She meowed quietly.

She shook her head, feeling shameful. "I shouldn't have said anything. I provoked him."

"No." Silverberry touched her shoulder with her tail. "You helped rid the clan of a rude, violent cat. He had no respect, and therefore no place in WindClan."

Perhaps... Starfaith looked up and slowly padded across the clearing to Scorchpaw. The young cat was standing by the gorse tunnel, staring out as if Tornadopaw were still there. But he was gone.

"Come to the medicine den," She meowed quietly. "You're bleeding."

Scorchpaw didn't take his eyes off the tunnel. "I wanted to believe that he could change... That he could be a warrior..."

She nosed his shoulder sympathetically. "Not all cats have the same destiny," She meowed quietly. "His path leads to darkness. Your fate is to become a great warrior."

"I hope so..." He murmured solemnly and dragged his gaze away from the gorse tunnel to look at her. "And yours is to be a great medicine cat, isn't it?"

Starfaith gently nudged him, and they began heading back toward the medicine den. "I hope so." She meowed.

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"Starfaith..."

Her mother's gentle voice sounded in her ear like a warm breeze. She blinked open her eyes and found herself in StarClan. Before her stood three star pelted warriors: Dreamwhisper, Weaselnose, and Sunripple.

She let out a soft purr and stepped forward, touching her nose to Dreamwhisper's. "It's good to see you!" She murmured. After a moment, she retraced her steps and looked at the two toms fondly. "There is something I must say."

Weaselnose gazed back at her, and Sunripple tilted his head.

Neither spoke.

She first moved closer to Weaselnose, staring at him as her heart swelled with emotion. "You may not have been my real father," She murmured. "But you were the best one to me and my siblings. I would have been proud to be your daughter. I'm grateful for how you were there for us, always."

The ginger and white tom stared at her, his eyes filled with affection. "I'm glad to hear that," He meowed warmly. "You will always be my daughter in my eyes." He leaned forward and rested his chin on her head, and she pressed her muzzle into his soft fur.

After a moment, she drew back and padded over to face Sunripple. The golden tabby tom stared at her, his eyes full of hope and uncertainty. "I'm sorry for how I reacted to the truth," She told him quietly. "It was a lot to take in. I never knew you when you were alive, but I hope that I can get to know you now. You're my father, just as Weaselnose is, and I want to be close with you."

Sunripple's yellow eyes shone with emotion. "Thank you, Starfaith..." He murmured, slowly moving forward and touching his nose to hers. "I'm proud to be your father, and I would love to get to know you better. It's better late than never."

As Starfaith stepped back, Dreamwhisper gazed at her warmly. "I'm so proud of you," She murmured. "I know this was difficult for you. But love is the greatest gift in the forest, and there is always room in the heart for more." She paused. "Speaking of which..."

The starry forest around them faded away, and Starfaith blinked as in its place appeared the grassy hills by the ShadowClan border, dark under the night sky. She gasped when she saw a familiar cat crouched by a pine tree. "Dewstorm!"

"He's waiting for you, just as I used to wait for your mother," Sunripple murmured. "Go to him."

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Starfaith's eyes flashed open, the dream vivid in her mind. She

raised her head and found herself back in her nest. Silverberry was sound asleep across from her. *Dewstorm is waiting!* She resisted the urge to bolt out of the camp and wake everyone in the process.

She crept out of her nest and into the clearing, relieved that she hadn't woken Silverberry. When she padded out the gorse tunnel, she found that the guard, Whitehare, had fallen asleep sitting up. His head hung over, his chin pressed to his chest. With a mildly amused shake of her head, she continued over the hills, quickening her pace as excitement pounded through her heart.

Sure enough, Dewstorm was crouched on ShadowClan's side of the border, peering out nervously. His eyes flashed when he saw her, and as he stood up, she raced down the grassy slope to him.

"Oh, Dewstorm!" She rushed forward and pressed her head into his fur, and he nuzzled her back. "I'm so glad you're alright!"

He licked her cheek fur and she stepped back. "I'm so sorry I couldn't come at sunrise that day," He meowed, his eyes full of sadness. "It's been busy..."

"What happened?" Starfaith stared at him worriedly, seeing the stress on his face. "Is everything alright?"

Dewstorm shook his head, lowering his gaze. "Hawkfeather is dead."

"What?" She gasped, her heart skipping a beat. "No!" *He can't be!*

"He was found dead on our territory the day I was supposed to meet you," He said quietly. "We think a rogue killed him."

Starfaith stared back at him, still in disbelief. She'd known Hawkfeather since her first trip to the moonstone. He was a fellow medicine cat, a dear friend. And now, he was hunting with StarClan. "I'm so sorry..." She whispered and rested her paw on top of Dewstorm's, her heart heavy with sorrow. "He was a great, wise medicine cat."

"He was," He agreed solemnly. After a moment of silence, he added, "I'm the sole medicine cat of ShadowClan now. That's why I couldn't meet you. I couldn't sneak away."

She leaned forward and licked his ear. "I understand." Unease shifted inside her stomach. "Will we still be able to see each other?" She asked quietly. "Your clan needs you more than ever. More than I do."

Dewstorm hesitated, staring at her with yellow eyes filled with longing. "I can manage both. We'll just have to meet at night from now on," He paused, seeming to want to change the subject. "Bloomfire is expecting kits," He told her. "Her own."

Though Starfaith was unsure about the future of their relationship, she could see how distressed he was already. He didn't want to think about losing her. She said no more about it. "That's wonderful," She purred lightly.

"Yeah, but..." Dewstorm shuffled his paws in the grass. "I'm nervous," He admitted. "This will be the first kitting I've handled on my own without Hawkfeather. And after what happened with Poppywing..." He trailed off.

Starfaith gently pressed her head against his. "Don't worry, everything will be alright," She murmured. "You're an amazing medicine cat. Bloomfire is in good paws."

He relaxed against her and sighed softly. "Thanks, Starfaith."

They stayed that way for a long while under the cover of the night. *Dewstorm will be a great medicine cat.* She thought. *It's his fate.*

And I get the feeling that I'll soon find out mine.

Chapter 14

A cold breeze ruffled Starfaith's fur as she padded through the night alongside Silverberry. As they crossed the moor, she raised her head to the stars. The moon hung in the dark sky, half concealed in shadow. She breathed in the cool air, feeling refreshed and at peace. *Everything will be made clear after tonight. I can feel it.*

It seemed to take no time at all for them to reach highstones. The other medicine cats were already gathered outside the tunnel. Dewstorm was sitting in front of the other medicine cats, looking solemn. Otterpelt, Ryeheart, and Spicewhisker's heads were low. *He must have just told them about Hawkfeather.* She thought sadly.

When the WindClan cats joined the others, Spicewhisker dipped his head. "This will be our first meeting without Hawkfeather," He meowed quietly.

"Yes," Silverberry agreed solemnly, and they were silent for a long moment. Starfaith noticed a small silver and black tabby she-cat beside Otterpelt, and at the same moment, Silverberry spoke again. "Who is this?"

As every cat looked at the stranger, she shuffled her paws uncomfortably, her green eyes filled with anxiety.

Otterpelt looked down at her and let out a purr. "This is my new apprentice, Sagepaw." She noticed her discomfort and added gently, "Don't worry, these cats are all friendly."

"H-hello," Sagepaw meowed quietly and nervously, slowly straightening.

I remember when I was that nervous about my first moonstone meeting. Starfaith thought with a pang of sympathy for the young she-cat. "It's nice to meet you, Sagepaw," She purred. "You're going

to love being a medicine cat."

"Starfaith is right," Dewstorm added warmly. "There is no greater gift than the ability to heal and speak to StarClan."

Sagepaw ducked her head shyly as every cat looked at her.

Ryeheart shuddered. "Chilly tonight, isn't it?" He commented, saving Sagepaw from further awkwardness.

"It is. We should go inside where we're sheltered from the wind." With a flick of her tail, Otterpelt turned and led the way into the tunnel, Sagepaw close behind. Spicewhisker, Ryeheart, and Silverberry fell in one by one behind her.

Starfaith paused at the entrance and turned to Dewstorm. He leaned forward and rested his chin on her head, purring. "I'm sorry we haven't seen each other in a while."

"It's alright," She meowed warmly and licked his shoulder before stepping back. "Has Bloomfire kitted?"

He nodded and stepped into the tunnel, and she followed. "Yes, a few days ago," He meowed as she padded behind him. "Everything went well. She's had four healthy kits."

"That's wonderful!" Starfaith purred as they reached the cave. "I told you that everything would be alright."

She and Dewstorm sat near Spicewhisker and looked toward the RiverClan medicine cats. Sagepaw's ceremony was about to begin. Otterpelt sat before the glowing stone, the light turning her reddish pelt into a pale orange. Sagepaw stared, her eyes wide and filled with awe.

"Sagepaw, is it your wish to enter the mysteries of StarClan as a medicine cat?" Otterpelt asked as she gazed at the apprentice.

"It is," She breathed.

"Then come forward." When Sagepaw did so, Otterpelt continued. "Warriors of StarClan, I present you with this apprentice.

She has chosen the path of a medicine cat. Grant her your wisdom and insight so that she may understand your ways and heal her Clan in accordance with your will."

As Sagepaw let out a purr, Otterpelt stood. "It's time to speak with StarClan," She meowed and crouched in her usual spot. "Come, touch your nose to the moonstone."

The new apprentice slowly joined her mentor, her eyes round. As Otterpelt continued instructing her softly, the other cats took their places around the moonstone.

Starfaith lowered herself onto her belly, aware of Dewstorm and Silverberry crouching on either side of her a few steps away. She met his warm yellow gaze before closing her eyes. *StarClan will reveal the meaning of the prophecy tonight.* She thought. *I know that they will.* She leaned forward and rested her nose against the icy surface of the stone.

An earsplitting crackle of thunder screeched in her ears, and she snapped open her eyes, letting out a horrified gasp. Wind raged around her violently, and she dug her claws into the stone under her out of fear of being blown away. *What's going on? This isn't StarClan!*

She looked around, squinting as wind blew into her face without mercy. She realized that she was at highstones, just outside the cave. It was dark above, but she couldn't see a star in sight. She looked up desperately for her warrior ancestors, but saw nothing but a black, empty sky. Even the moon was absent.

She breathed inward in shock only to feel swift, cold air rush down her throat, and she staggered backwards, coughing and gasping for air. Suddenly, something crashed into her, throwing her down against the rocks, and she looked up to see the shadowy shape of a cat standing over her, yellow eyes blazing with hatred.

"What-" Starfaith gasped against the roaring of the wind and stared in horror as more shadowy shapes raced out of the darkness and lunged for her, claws out and teeth bared in fury. She struggled desperately, but countless cats were on her, digging their teeth and

claws into her and ripping at her flesh.

"No! StarClan, help me!" She shrieked as the shadowy cats tore at her, blood trickling from massive, horrible wounds and forming a sticky crimson pool under her. "Stop!"

One of the cats sneered at her and raised an unsheathed paw, swinging at her face, and terror and pain swept over her as her vision disappeared, and she saw nothing but blackness.

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"No!" Starfaith jolted awake and shot up onto her paws, her eyes snapping open as she staggered backwards, breathing heavily.

Silverberry shot to her side. "Starfaith?" She gasped in alarm. "What's wrong?"

She couldn't respond. She trembled uncontrollably, the nightmare vivid in her mind, and she stared at the floor of the cave, frozen with shock. *They killed me... They tore me apart...*

The other medicine cats were awakening around her. Dewstorm saw what was happening and raced to her, his yellow eyes lit with fierce concern. "Starfaith!" He exclaimed. "What happened?"

"I..." She couldn't speak. She let out a whimper and sank onto the floor of the cave, wrapping her tail around herself. Silverberry crouched by her side and began lapping at her fur in an attempt to comfort her. Dewstorm sat by her other side and stared down at her anxiously, longing to do something, but unable to due to the presence of the others.

"What's going on?" Ryeheart stepped toward them, and Spicewhisker followed, looking worried. Sagepaw was behind them, excitedly telling Otterpelt about her first meeting with StarClan. But when they noticed Starfaith's condition, they hurried over to her.

She squeezed her eyes shut and tried to calm herself. Silverberry stopped licking her and stared at her anxiously. "What happened?" She whispered. "What did you see?"

My own death... Starfaith trembled. *I am the star that will die...* She looked toward the tunnel. *Out there, I will die... But when? In a few moons? When I'm old and training an apprentice?*

Tonight?

"Starfaith?" Silverberry prompted worriedly.

She blinked and looked up to see every cat staring at her anxiously. "I... I'll be fine." She struggled to sound strong, pushing away her fear. She slowly sat up. "I'm sorry." She looked at her former mentor, having difficulty focusing on her face. "I-I'll tell you about it when we get back to camp."

"Alright..." Her mentor stared at her and touched her shoulder with her tail. "Let's go. You'll feel better once you're back at camp."

No... Starfaith looked toward the moonstone. *I'm so frightened... I want to see StarClan. I need them more than ever...*

Silverberry gently nudged her to her paws, but she only stumbled and slumped back down, her muscles tense with shock.

"She's in shock," Dewstorm meowed worriedly. "She needs time to calm down. I want to stay here with her and talk to her about it." He turned to the other medicine cats. "You can start heading back to your camps, we'll catch up with you."

Ryeheart blinked. "What? Leave without you two when she's in this condition?"

"Why should *you* stay with her?" Silverberry turned on the ShadowClan medicine cat, her eyes flashing. "She's *my* clanmate!"

"Let him stay!" Starfaith rasped, hardly caring at this point if her mentor found out about she and Dewstorm. She wanted his comfort and to be alone with him. "Please."

The silver she-cat's eyes flashed with surprise. She glanced at Dewstorm, then back down at her. A feeling of cold dread washed over Starfaith, adding on to her stress. *She sees it now. She knows.*

She was surprised and relieved when Silverberry only slowly dipped her head. "Alright," She murmured, resting her gaze on Starfaith's. "We'll talk about it when you get back." She glanced at Dewstorm. *"All* of it." After a moment, concern filled her expression again. "Are you sure you'll be alright?"

"I'll be fine," Starfaith murmured. *For now...* "I'll see you back at camp."

Her former mentor stared at her for a long moment. Then she turned away, gesturing to the others with her tail. "Come on. Starfaith and Dewstorm will catch up with us."

Ryeheart dipped his head to them as he followed her, and Spicewhisker paused in front of them. "I hope you're alright, Starfaith." He meowed, then gave Dewstorm a nod. "Take care." He turned away, and Otterpelt and Sagepaw watched them for a moment before following.

The medicine cats slipped through the tunnel. Silverberry was about to follow them when she hesitated, looking over her shoulder at Starfaith worriedly.

She cares about me so much. She's known me since I was just a kit dreaming of the stars. She forced a purr and blinked warmly at her. Silverberry's eyes softened, and she looked away, following the others through the tunnel. Starfaith and Dewstorm stayed alone in silence for a moment.

She let out a shaky sigh, and Dewstorm crouched by her side and pressed himself against her, licking her fur repeatedly. "What happened?" He asked anxiously between licks. "I've never seen you like this."

"I... It's nothing." Starfaith rested against him, trying to keep herself from trembling.

"StarClan showed you something, and it's scared you out of your pelt," Dewstorm meowed quietly. "I can see that. Please, tell me what happened."

She shook her head miserably. "I can't," She rasped. "You just have to trust me." *I can't tell him that I'm going to die. I just can't. Nothing can be done about it. This is my fate.*

Dewstorm stared at her, his yellow eyes lit with love and concern. But he didn't question her any further and wrapped his tail around her. "Just relax, it's alright," He murmured. "It was just a dream. You're safe."

She closed her eyes and rested her head against his shoulder. They stayed like that for a long while until she found herself calming down, comforted by his scent and the feeling of his warm body against hers. She drew in a deep breath and slowly sat up. "We should go," She meowed quietly. "You need to get back to ShadowClan."

"Are you well enough to travel?" Dewstorm asked as he stood, touching his nose to her ear. "I can go with you to WindClan if you want."

Starfaith hesitated. She would feel much safer if he went with her. But he had already made the journey to highstones, and he still needed to make the return trip to ShadowClan. *He'd be exhausted. He should get back to his camp as soon as possible.* "That's alright," She meowed quietly. "Your clan needs you."

"Alright, if you're sure..." Dewstorm stayed by her side as they crossed the cave toward the tunnel. She stepped through the dark tunnel, and he followed close behind. When they emerged on the other side, Starfaith peered out warily.

This is where I was in my dream... The rocky ledges of highstones were dark and shadowy in the night. The sky was dark against the rocks and the treeline in the distance. Crickets chirped softly in the grass. There wasn't a cat in sight. She slowly relaxed and stepped out.

Dewstorm padded to her side and looked at her worriedly. "Are you sure you'll be alright?" He asked quietly. "You know you can tell me anything."

She met his gaze, feeling a rush of guilt. I don't want to hide anything from you. *But this is something that would be too difficult to handle. For both of us.* "I'll be alright," She murmured, partially speaking to herself as well.

He studied her uncertainly, then slowly nodded. "We can talk about it another time," He meowed quietly. "Whenever you're ready." He flicked his tail. "Let's go. Silverberry will be waiting for you."

Starfaith nodded, and they began padding down the rocky slope. They hadn't gotten far when the bushes rustled behind them. She spun, and at that same moment, weight crashed into her, knocking the air out of her and pinning her onto her side.

StarClan, no! Her heart exploded with panic, and the world blurred around her. *It's happening.* Claws dug into her shoulders, and her eyes flashed upward to see a white tom standing over her, his yellow eyes blazing with maliciousness. Beyond him, she caught a glimpse of Dewstorm gasping under two other cats who snarled and clawed at him.

The white tom swung down at her, and hot pain seared her chest as his claws tore at her skin. She shrieked out and struggled helplessly, unable to free herself. She was a medicine cat with very little battle training. On top of that, she was a thin, delicate cat. She had no hope of fighting off a savage rogue.

Dewstorm's yowl of pain caught her attention, and she jerked her head toward him. *Dewstorm!* One of his attackers had slashed his claws across his shoulder, sending him stumbling backwards, blood trickling down his forearm from the deep wounds. He caught Starfaith's eye and started toward her on three paws, only to have the second rogue lunge at him and throw him down onto the rocks. The first attacker sneered and raised his claws, his attention on Dewstorm's throat.

No! I'm supposed to die tonight, not him! Terror and desperation gave her the strength she needed to pull free from the white rogue. She ignored the pain in her chest as she raced for Dewstorm, cannoning into the rogue before he could strike his throat.

As the cat huffed out in surprise, Starfaith staggered and snarled, trembling as she faced him. Behind her, Dewstorm had pulled himself to his paws, leaping at the other rogue.

Starfaith's breath caught in her throat as she recognized his dark tabby fur and glaring yellow eyes. *No...!*

"I told you I'd make you pay," He sneered.

"Tornadowind!" She choked in disbelief. Before she had time to react or question this, heavy weight slammed down onto her back claws tearing down her spine, and she gasped as her paws gave way under her, and her jaw hit the rocks hard, her teeth clanging together and sending a sharp, throbbing pain through her skull.

The weight vanished as teeth closed around her scruff, and she gasped as she was thrown clear across the ground. She rolled against a large rock and groaned in pain. *Oh, StarClan...!* She tried to pull herself to her paws, only to fall back to the ground. Her back and chest felt sticky and hot with blood.

She realized that the white tom and Tornadowind were stalking toward her, ready to finish her off. The third rogue tossed Dewstorm aside and spat at him before following his companions.

The ShadowClan cat's fur trickled with blood, and he staggered backwards. *Run!* Starfaith silently shrieked at him. *Get out of here!*

But the moment he saw all three rogues closing in on her, he let out a yowl. "Starfaith!" He stumbled as quickly as he could across the rocks and in the way of the rogues, crouching over her and snarling defiantly.

"No!" She croaked. "We'll both die!" She wasn't sure if he heard her, and didn't get a chance to find out as the rogues lunged for Dewstorm.

The white tom dragged him away from Starfaith and threw him onto his back, raising his claws and swinging down. Dewstorm screeched out in agony as claws tore open his stomach, blood spurting out of the fresh wound.

"Dewstorm!" She shrieked and tried to pull herself toward him with her front paws, feeling her pads sticky with blood. Before she could get far, The other rogue lunged down at her and buried his teeth into her flank, flesh blood gushing out and running down her belly.

She cried out and looked up weakly, her vision blurring and spotted with black. Tornadowind stood over her, his eyes lit with malice. He raised his claws and swung down at her. Sharp agony blazed across her throat like fire, and a heartbeat later, everything went black.

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"Starfaith..."

She slowly opened her eyes, bracing herself to face Tornadowind and the rogues. But she wasn't at highstones anymore, though she was still laying on her side, twisted in an awkward position. She slowly turned onto her stomach, feeling warm grass under her. She felt no pain, and when she looked down, her fur was soft and clean of blood. She raised her paw to her throat cautiously. There wasn't a scratch on her.

"Starfaith."

She raised her head and saw Dreamwhisper standing over her, her eyes soft with love and sadness. On either side of her stood Weaselnose and Sunripple. Beyond them, she saw Hivepelt, Icetail, and even Hawkfeather, their pelts shimmering with starlight. When she looked down, she realized that her own fur twinkled with stars.

"I'm dead..." Starfaith murmured as she slowly stood and met her mother's gaze. "I'm in StarClan."

Dreamwhisper nodded solemnly. "It's never an easy truth to accept," She meowed softly. "But it won't be long before you call this place your home." She started to turn away, waving her bright tail. "Come."

"Wait..." She stared after her. "What about Dewstorm? Is he alright?"

Her mother turned to her again, her eyes hesitant and full of

sadness. "I'm very sorry. He'll be joining us shortly."

"What?" Starfaith's heart skipped a beat. "No! He can't die!"

Dreamwhisper stepped closer and gently touched her shoulder with her soft tail. "His wounds are too severe," She murmured. "He is alone. He will join StarClan before any cat finds him."

Beyond her, Hawkfeather lowered his head, his eyes filled with sorrow. "ShadowClan will be left without a medicine cat," He meowed solemnly.

"That can't happen!" Starfaith exclaimed, her mind racing with panic. "StarClan cats can visit the living. I can go to ShadowClan and tell Depthstar about Dewstorm."

Hivepelt's eyes widened. "You can't interfere with fate. You know that."

"Dewstorm is not meant to die tonight. I know it!" She looked at the StarClan warriors desperately. "Please, let me save Dewstorm," She pleaded. "I must at least try."

Dreamwhisper exchanged an uncertain look with Hivepelt. She waited, staring at them impatiently. *Dewstorm is dying right now! Hurry!*

"Very well," Hivepelt murmured. "You may try."

Thank StarClan! Starfaith thought in relief and turned away, determination and fear blazing through her. *Dewstorm will not die tonight. I won't let him.*

Chapter 15

The ShadowClan camp was cold and quiet. Every cat seemed to be sound asleep in their dens. Starfaith drifted across the clearing, walking on starlit, semi-transparent paws. It felt so strange to be in the camp without being confronted by anyone. She was a warrior of StarClan now. No ShadowClan warrior could scent her or here her. Only Depthstar would be aware of her presence.

She slipped into the leader's den. Depthstar was asleep in his nest, his flank rising and falling slowly. She hesitantly crouched by the ShadowClan leader and whispered. "Depthstar." When he didn't wake, she repeated urgently. "Depthstar..."

His dark blue eyes flickered open, and his fur bristled with surprise when he saw her. He sat up in his nest quickly. "Starfaith? What are you doing here?" He looked past her. "Who let you into the camp?"

She dipped her head politely. "Only you can see me, Depthstar. The stars in my fur will tell you that I walk with StarClan now," She murmured. As Depthstar's eyes widened, she went on anxiously. "Something horrible has happened to Dewstorm. You must go to highstones immediately to save him."

"What?" Depthstar gasped. He shot to his paws and pelted out of the den. Starfaith quickly followed him, surprised to see another cat in the clearing.

Bloodpaw seemed to have just returned to camp. He stared at Depthstar, clearly startled by him. "Depthstar? Is everything okay?"

"No," The clan leader responded as Starfaith stepped to his side, his voice full of fear. "Something's wrong!"

The apprentice hurried over to his leader. "What is it?" He asked anxiously. "Rogues? Is-"

"It's Dewstorm," Depthstar breathed, staring at her. "Starfaith just told me that something has happened to Dewstorm!"

As Bloodpaw stared at his leader in confusion, Starfaith fearfully imagined Dewstorm bleeding out onto the stones, the life draining out of him. *Depthstar is in shock. But there is no time for him to process this!*

She whisked around Depthstar and hissed urgently in his ear. "We have to go, now! There's no time to waste!"

At her command, the bluish black tom jolted forward. "We have to go!" He gasped and headed for the thorn tunnel. "We have to go to highstones, now!"

Bloodpaw's fur bristled in panic. "Shall I fetch Cobra-"

"No, there's no time!" Depthstar hissed at him to Starfaith's relief. "Come with me, Bloodpaw! We must hurry!" He raced through the thorn tunnel and into the forest, and the apprentice pelted after him.

Starfaith bounded just above the forest floor ahead of Depthstar, leading the way to highstones. She looked back and saw Bloodpaw hard on his leader's paws, his yellow eyes wide and anxious.

It truly can't be a coincidence that Bloodpaw is the one who happened to be in the clearing. She thought with a rush of comfort. *Dewstorm was right. He is a good cat, and when his clan hears of his bravery tonight, they will see that.*

They ran out of the pine forest and toward the rocky slope of highstones. Starfaith bounded up the rocks and looked behind her impatiently. *They're so far behind!* He knew that as living cats, they could not move as quickly as she could. But knowing that Dewstorm's life was ebbing away by the second scared her. *What if they don't make it in time?* She wondered anxiously.

Bloodpaw had paused at the base of highstones, panting heavily. Depthstar paused ahead of him and glared over his shoulder. "There's no time to rest! Come on!"

As the red tabby apprentice forced himself onward, Starfaith continued up the slope, soaring like a breeze up the rocky incline. When she reached the top, she let out a gasp.

Dewstorm lay motionless in a pool of blood, his eyes closed. Blood ran from the wound in his belly, seeping into the stones. She ran to his side and stared down at him anxiously. *He's still alive... The rogues must have thought they'd finished him.* She looked across the stones and felt a chill run down her spine.

There she was. Her body lay against the rock, where she'd spent her final moments. Her yellow eyes were glazed over and sightless, her yellow fur stained with blood. Her throat was torn open, blood running out and pooling under her, and she shuddered as she remembered the moment Tornadowind had slashed it open.

It was the strangest feeling to see herself dead, let alone see herself at all from a perspective that was not from her own eyes.

"No!" Depthstar's gasp caught her attention, and she forced her gaze away from the horrifying sight of her body. The ShadowClan leader and Bloodpaw had reached them at last.

Thank StarClan! Starfaith took a step back, watching anxiously as Depthstar crouched by Dewstorm and nosed at his fur. "Dewstorm!" He gasped. "Can you hear me?"

Dewstorm didn't respond. *Come on, Dewstorm... It's okay. Your clanmates are here.* She stared down at him desperately. *I'm here...*

"She's dead."

She looked up to see Bloodpaw crouched by her body, looking back solemnly at his leader.

"I know," Depthstar meowed quietly as he pressed his paws to Dewstorm's wounds, blood seeping between his dark toes.

Bloodpaw rushed to his leader's side and stared down at the medicine cat. "Is- Is he-"

Before he could finish, Dewstorm's body jerked, and he started to

cough weakly. Relief flooded over Starfaith as she looked down at him. *He's alright!* She crouched beside him as he drew in ragged breaths, though she knew that he would be unaware of her presence.

"Dewstorm!" Depthstar let out a sigh of relief, relaxing a little. "It's alright-"

"Starfaith..." Dewstorm let out a moan and trembled as he tried to raise his head, his eyes dazed and unfocused. "Starfaith... She needs help..!"

She felt her heart throb with emotion as she watched him. *He nearly died for me... He truly loves me, and I feel the same way about him.* She knew that it wouldn't be long before he found out about her death.

Starfaith looked at the ShadowClan leader anxiously. "He needs cobwebs," She told him urgently. "Hurry."

"Hold still," Depthstar told him as he turned to the apprentice. "Bloodpaw, go find some cobwebs, leaves, anything to stop the bleeding."

To her relief, Bloodpaw gathered cobwebs fairly quickly and rushed back to them. Depthstar took the cobwebs and began pressing them to Dewstorm's wound.

"Where is she?" Dewstorm croaked weakly, his dim yellow eyes flicking up to his leader. "Where's Starfaith?"

I'm right here. She thought sadly, wishing that he could see her. Depthstar continued to apply pressure to his wound, not giving him a response.

Bloodpaw spoke up quietly. "I'm sorry. She... She's dead."

For a long moment, Dewstorm just stared at the apprentice, as though struggling to understand his words, and Starfaith felt a rush of sorrow as he wailed softly in grief. "No!" He whimpered and let his head fall to the ground again.

"Dewstorm..." She stared down at him anxiously. He didn't move,

but she relaxed when she saw him breathing slowly. *He's unconscious, but alive.*

Depthstar stared down at his medicine cat anxiously. "What happened?" He demanded. "Who did this?" When Dewstorm didn't respond, he prodded his side gently. "Dewstorm?"

"Is he-" Bloodpaw started in alarm.

"He's unconscious." Depthstar drew in a deep breath, staring down at his medicine cat. "We need to get him to camp."

The dark red tabby apprentice looked back toward her body. "What about Starfaith?" He asked quietly.

Depthstar followed his gaze and padded over to the body, Bloodpaw behind him. Starfaith hesitantly followed, though she looked away from the gruesome body that she had once lived in.

"Thank you for leading me to Dewstorm," She heard the ShadowClan leader whisper to her. "May you walk safely among the stars."

Thank you, Depthstar. She silently responded. *Thank you for saving him.*

After a moment of silence, he turned to Bloodpaw. "We need to take care of Dewstorm first," He meowed quietly. "Carry Starfaith's body into the cave. She'll be safe there until her clanmates arrive."

Bloodpaw nodded, and Starfaith watched as he carefully grasped her body by the scruff and began dragging her toward the cave. She looked back at Depthstar and Dewstorm for a moment before silently following the apprentice through the tunnel. *I'd like to speak with him.*

When they entered the cave, Starfaith stepped forward to stand beside Bloodpaw, watching as he laid down her body gently beside the moonstone. "Thank you," He whispered to her body. "All of ShadowClan thanks you."

At that moment, Starfaith decided to make herself visible to him. It

was an unexplainable ability that StarClan cats possessed. She simply needed to feel the will for him to see her. She did so as she spoke. "Your path has been a difficult one, Bloodpaw."

The apprentice let out a startled gasp and jerked his head toward her, his yellow eyes widening. She went on with a purr. "Dewstorm believes in you, so I know I can believe in you, too. All of StarClan is watching you."

Bloodpaw continued to stare at her, his eyes full of awe as he stood frozen. She felt a pang of sympathy for him. *He isn't a medicine cat apprentice. Seeing a StarClan cat is a lot for him to handle.*

"Have no fear, young one," She told him softly. "StarClan has set you on the right path. But you must have the courage to follow it."

The reddish apprentice trembled, the light of the moonstone glowing against his fur. "What do you mean?" He rasped. "What path?"

The words entered Starfaith's mind before she could understand what they meant. StarClan had sent them. "Revenge will guide you," She murmured.

Bloodpaw's eyes lit with shock. She realized that he had heard these words before. "You know about the prophecy?" He breathed.

"Bloodpaw!" Depthstar yowled from outside the cave, and Starfaith let herself disappear. *Dewstorm will be alright now.* She thought. *Somehow, our destinies are intertwined with Bloodpaw's. StarClan has guided us.*

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Sunlight shone through the entrance of the den, awakening him. He slowly blinked open his eyes and sighed shakily. *How long was I asleep?* He tried to get up only to feel pain shoot through his stomach, and he sank back into his nest. *I suppose I'll need time to heal, just like any other cat.*

It had been two days since he and Starfaith had been attacked at highstones. He'd been brought back to camp by Depthstar and

Bloodpaw, who had been made a warrior since and was now Bloodfur. The newly made warrior had run all the way to ThunderClan to fetch Spicewhisker. The ThunderClan medicine cat had come back with Bloodfur to treat Dewstorm. He would have been dead if it hadn't been for Spicewhisker.

But I owe more to Starfaith than anything. Dewstorm thought, his heart throbbing with sorrow. He closed his eyes and rested his chin on his paws, choking back a sob of grief. *I should have died instead of her. I'm so sorry, Starfaith.*

"Hello, Dewstorm."

He froze at the sound of the familiar, warm voice. He raised his head and saw Starfaith sitting in front of him, her yellow fur glowing and sparkling with starlight. "Starfaith...!" He breathed, staring at her as emotions churned through his heart. "Oh, Starfaith, I'm so sorry..."

"Nothing was your fault," She promised gently. "I'm so glad that you're alright."

Dewstorm gazed up at her sadly. "You led Depthstar to me," He murmured. "I'd be dead if it weren't for you. I truly owe you my life."

She crouched and leaned forward, gently nuzzling him, and he let out a soft purr. "It wasn't your time to die," She told him gently. "You're going to be a wonderful medicine cat for many, many moons. I will be with you, always."

He pressed his head into her warm, starlit fur. "I love you, Starfaith," He murmured. "I'll always remember what you've done for me."

"I love you too." She stepped back, and Dewstorm blinked as another star pelted cat stepped to her side, his yellow eyes fixed down on him.

He let out a faint purr at the sight of his former mentor. "Hawkfeather!"

"Greetings, Dewstorm." The spotted tabby dipped his head as he sat down beside Starfaith. "I'm glad you're alright. ShadowClan couldn't afford to lose such a fine medicine cat." He paused, looking hesitant before he added, "I was wrong about Bloodfur."

Dewstorm stared at him, hardly believing his ears. "What?"

"Don't make me say it again," Hawkfeather grunted, mildly amused. "His birth was not a bad omen. Bloodfur has the heart of a good cat." He paused. "However, I was right about one thing... He will do terrible things." He exchanged a glance with Starfaith. "Every cat in StarClan knows that. But it will be necessary in order for him to see reason and save the clans."

He stared at his companions, unease prickling his fur. "What things?" He whispered, his mind racing. "Save the clans from what? The rogue attacks?"

As Hawkfeather looked away, Starfaith spoke softly. "All will be made clear in time, Dewstorm. Have faith in StarClan."

Of course. I always do... Dewstorm thought as he watched his visitors fade away. *Thanks to Starfaith, I am alive. I must be prepared for what is to come. The clans will survive.* From where he lay, he could see out into the clearing. He watched Bloodfur sit in the shadows, looking around as his clanmates glared at him resentfully.

But it all depends on you, Bloodfur.

THE END